



Lesson Plan: "CHISHOLM '72 - Unbought and Unbossed"

OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with viewing the film "CHISHOLM '72 - Unbought and Unbossed," an hour long documentary by filmmaker Shola Lynch. The film follows the 1972 campaign waged by Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman to run for a major party's nomination for United States President. Chisholm first makes her mark on American political history when, in 1968, she becomes the first African-American woman elected to Congress, representing New York.

Chisholm, an outspoken advocate for the rights of women and minorities and an unfaltering critic of the Vietnam War, was shunned by the political establishment. The film reveals how this passionate and articulate woman gained the support of an unusual crew of political supporters, including blacks, feminists, and young voters. The story of her campaign and the obstacles she faced reveal what really happens "behind the scenes" as candidates maneuver their way to the White House.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Research the process of presidential elections as detailed in the U.S. Constitution
- Evaluate the meaning of citizenship, representation and the importance of voting
- Assess the role of political campaigns in a democracy
- Explore the role of conventions in the electoral process
- Learn more about the history of political representation of minorities in the U.S.
- Gain skills they can use to analyze and evaluate media information

This lesson will also provide students with an opportunity to practice writing, speaking, listening, research, and critical thinking skills.

GRADE LEVEL:

7-12

SUBJECT AREAS:

Civics / Government
Social Studies

U.S. History

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:

3-5 class periods, plus homework preparation

MATERIALS:

- Videotape of "CHISHOLM '72 - Unbought and Unbossed" and equipment to show it. P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast.
- Internet access for student research
- Copies of the U.S. Constitution

BACKGROUND:

Many schoolchildren are asked, as part of a class assignment, to imagine... "If you were president of the United States, what would you do? What laws would you change?" The president is the leader of our democracy, and the process of electing the president is taught as an example of our democracy at work. This process was set up in the United States Constitution, which requires a candidate for the presidency to meet three qualifications: to be at least 35 years old, a natural born citizen of the United States, and a resident of the United States for 14 years.

When asked why she declared her candidacy for President of the United States in 1972, Shirley Chisholm explained, "I ran because somebody had to do it first. In this country everybody is supposed to be able to run for President, but that has never really been true." Her campaign, as seen in the film, provides a case study for students to see the "behind the scenes" reality of waging a presidential campaign.

As the first African-American woman to run for President, Chisholm also represented an important opportunity for historically disenfranchised segments of the American population to have a "voice" in the nation's political scene. Her candidacy received support from various factions of the civil rights movement and from the growing women's rights movement. The film reveals the political maneuvering infamous in American politics, as Chisholm gains and loses supporters while forging the "Chisholm trail" to the 1972 Democratic political convention in Miami, Florida.

This lesson plan is designed to help students explore the realities of American presidential politics, and understand reasons why the candidate a voter believes is "the best candidate" may not be the one elected. The writing exercise and discussion will also help students learn about the historical significance of Chisholm as a Black woman running for national office, and the challenges she faced in her candidacy.

ACTIVITY:

Procedure

Establish a framework for understanding the issues by reviewing the above background segment, viewing the documentary, and discussing the documentary and related issues. Students will do a preliminary homework assignment before viewing the film, then screen the film during two classroom periods. They will participate in a writing assignment on the issues presented in the film and conclude with a classroom discussion.

Before Viewing the Documentary

Have the students watch the film in two separate class periods. Prior to the first class screening of the film, assign students a homework assignment researching the process for U.S. Presidential elections. Students are to take notes on the following topics to assist in the discussion:

1. What does the U.S. Constitution say about how American citizens are to select their President?
2. What are political conventions, and when were they first used in the process of electing presidents?
3. Which amendment of the Constitution created the electoral college, and what role does that body play in choosing the president?

In addition to copies of the Constitution, more information can be found at these websites:

- *P.O.V.: "CHISHOLM '72,"*
http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/chisholm/special_conventions.html
- *U.S. Constitution Online,*
http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_pcam.html
- *Ben's Guide to the US Government for Kids,*
<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/election/index.html>
- *Are Political Conventions Obsolete?*
<http://hnn.us/articles/6168.html>

The teacher may also assign sections of History or Social Studies books used by each grade on presidential elections.

Viewing the Documentary

While students watch the documentary during the two class periods, require them to take notes on the following topics to prepare for the writing assignment and discussion which will follow the screening:

- the issues and positions taken by Chisholm during the campaign;
- the role of the media in covering the candidates;
- Chisholm's role in encouraging voter registration;
- the support of blacks and those involved in the civil rights movement;
- the support of the women's movement for her candidacy;
- the political maneuvering at the Miami convention.

After Viewing the Documentary

In order to focus the students on the documentary, have students engage in a 10-minute writing exercise before beginning discussion. For example, ask the students to write down and briefly discuss the two strongest arguments for, and against, the following statement:

"Shirley Chisholm's campaign for President of the United States in 1972 was more than symbolic. It made a true difference in the political history of this nation by allowing for the voice of blacks and females, long disenfranchised, to be 'heard' in the national debate on issues."

Guiding Questions for the Discussion

1. What were the specific issues given special attention by Chisholm and her supporters during her campaign? How were the positions she took different (or similar) from the other 12 Democratic candidates?
2. In the beginning of the film, several of Chisholm's supporters discuss how she engaged them in the political process in a way they had not been involved before. Why was this significant?
3. Chisholm describes the reception she received from the male members of Congress when she joined their ranks in 1968. What was the significance of the "forty-two-five" story that she told?
4. What role did the media play in presenting the candidates to the American public? Did the media hurt or help Chisholm's candidacy? The other candidates?
5. Chisholm was one of the founders of the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.), and several speakers in the film talk about the support she received from the women's movement. How did that support fail her in the end?
6. Chisholm was a leading member of the Congressional Black Caucus, but she did not receive their endorsement for president? Why not?
7. Why were young people also special constituents of Chisholm's? What attracted them to her as a candidate?
8. Pay particular attention to the "behind the scenes" events at the Miami Democratic convention. Why did Congressman Ron Dellums shift his support from Chisholm to McGovern? Why was this significant?

ASSESSMENT:

Consider the following opportunities for assessment:

- Grade the students for completion of the homework assignment and participation in the discussion;
- Grade the students for participation in class discussions;
- Evaluate the writing assignments according to a rubric designed by the teacher;
- Have students evaluated the credibility of information gathered on web sites? Have they taken initiative to follow up in reference books, printed books and articles?
- Have students presented multiple perspectives in an objective way?

- Have students made a persuasive case for why they favor one perspective over another?
- Have students included explicit criteria in their presentation or written assignments for the basis of their stand on any given issue?
- Have students demonstrated an awareness of the competing claims that different people or groups can make on an issue?
- Have students demonstrated an awareness of the stakes involved in disagreements about issues relating to cultural authority and ethnic identity?

EXTENSIONS:

1. Ask students to write a research paper on the last three presidential campaigns. Who were the major candidates, and what were their positions on the issues? Did they represent diverse segments of the American population? How many women and representatives of minority groups were among the serious candidates?
2. Have students write a personal biography of Shirley Chisholm, who died in January 2005. There is information in the film about her childhood in Barbados and her early career as an educator. Students should refer to other biographical resources. At the end of the film Chisholm says, "I want to be remembered as a woman who fought for change in the twentieth century." Did she achieve her goal?

Print resources:

- Hicks, Nancy. *The Honorable Shirley Chisholm, Congresswoman from Brooklyn*. Lion Books, 1974
 - Pollack, Jill S. *Shirley Chisholm*. Watts Franklin, 1994.
 - Scheader, Catherine. *Shirley Chisholm: Teacher and Congresswoman*. Enslow Publishers, 1990.
 - Chisholm, Shirley. *Unbought and Unbossed: An Autobiography*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970.
 - Chisholm, Shirley. *The Good Fight*. New York; Harper & Row, 1973.
 - Records 1960-1978, 49 cu. Ft. of the New Democratic Coalition of New York. Rutgers, University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives. New Brunswick, New Jersey.
3. Invite a politician or activist who was politically active in the 70's to visit the class and discuss the political times with the students... You could also invite someone who broke a color or sexual barrier in a local or state political body to share what it was like to be the first black, Hispanic, Asian or woman to hold political office in their community.
 4. Ask students to write a research paper on the history of the disenfranchisement of women and minorities in the United States. What is the history of voting rights for these groups? What developments in the civil rights and women's movements

led to the groups gaining the right to vote? How did these developments change the face of U.S. electoral politics?

Web resources:

- The State of Black American Politics
http://www.blackcommentator.com/9_nul.html
- National Organization for Women
<http://www.now.org/>
- 10 For Change
<http://www.10forchange.org>

Print resources:

- Lucius Barker, Mack Jones, and Katherine Tate. *African Americans in the American Political System*. Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs New Jersey, 1994.
- John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss. *From Slavery to Freedom*. McGraw Hill: New York, 1947; 8th edition 2000.
- Michael Dawson. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in American Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

RELATED LEARNING STANDARDS:

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>.

CIVICS

Standard 1: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government

Level IV [Grade 9-12], Benchmark 1.

Understands how politics enables a group of people with varying opinions and/or interests to reach collective decisions, influence decisions, and accomplish goals that they could not reach as individuals (e.g., managing the distribution of resources, allocating benefits and burdens, managing conflicts)

Level IV, Benchmark 6.

Understands major arguments for the necessity of politics and government (e.g., people cannot fulfill their potential without politics and government, people would be insecure or endangered without government, people working collectively can accomplish goals and solve problems they could not achieve alone)

Standard 8: Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society

Level IV, Benchmark 3.

Knows the major ideas about republican government that influenced the development of the United States Constitution (e.g., the concept of representative government, the importance of civic virtue or concern for the common good)

Level IV, Benchmark 6.

Understands how various provisions of the Constitution and principles of the constitutional system help to insure an effective government that will not exceed its limits

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity

Level III [Grade 6-8], Benchmark 4.

Knows reasons why most political conflict in the United States has generally been less divisive than in many other nations (e.g., a shared respect for the Constitution and its principles, a sense of unity within diversity, willingness to relinquish power when voted out of office, willingness to use the legal system to manage conflicts, opportunities to improve one's

Level IV, Benchmark 5.

Knows how universal public education and the existence of a popular culture that crosses class boundaries have tended to reduce the intensity of political conflict (e.g., by creating common ground among diverse groups)

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

Level IV, Benchmark 2.

Knows discrepancies between American ideals and the realities of American social and political life (e.g., the ideal of equal opportunity and the reality of unfair discrimination)

Standard 17: Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government

Level IV, Benchmark 3.

Knows the many ways citizens can participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels, and understands the usefulness of other forms of political participation in influencing public policy (e.g., attending political and governmental meetings, demonstrating, contacting public officials, writing letters, boycotting, community organizing, petitioning, picketing)

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Level III, Benchmark 1.

Understands how participation in civic and political life can help bring about the attainment of individual and public goals (e.g., personal goals such as living in a safe and orderly neighborhood, obtaining a good education, living in a healthy environment; public goals such as increasing the safety of the community, improving local transportation facilities, providing opportunities for education and recreation)

Level IV, Benchmark 3.

Knows the many ways citizens can participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels, and understands the usefulness of other forms of political participation in influencing public policy (e.g., attending political and governmental meetings, demonstrating, contacting public officials, writing letters, boycotting, community organizing, petitioning, picketing)

Level IV, Benchmark 4.

Knows historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements seeking to expand liberty, to insure the equal rights of all citizens, and/or to realize other values fundamental to American constitutional democracy (e.g., the suffrage and civil rights movements)

U.S. HISTORY

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

Level IV, Benchmark 5.

Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved (e.g., the current debate over affirmative action and to what degree affirmative action policies have reached their goals; the evolution of government support for the rights of the disabled; the emergence of the Gay Liberation Movement and civil rights of gay Americans; continuing debates over multiculturalism, bilingual education, and group identity and rights vs. individual rights and identity; successes and failures of the modern feminist movement)