



Lesson C: How do systems of power repress voices of dissent?

Content Areas: English, History, Political Science, Information Literacy

Level: 12th Grade or Early College

Overview

In this lesson, students discuss different modes of political protest, and use their understanding of the history of pamphleteering to deconstruct the style, argument, and effectiveness of zines from the Barnard Library Zine Collection Online Exhibition entitled, "Elections and Protest: Zines from the Barnard Library Collection" as tools for subverting political oppression.

Duration

60 minutes

Lesson Objectives

Through participation in this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the purpose, advantages, and disadvantages of several different modes of violent and non-violent protest
- Define, identify, and discuss historical examples of self-publications used for political protest
- Define "zine"
- Use images, words, and phrases to infer an author's purpose for creating a work
- Discuss an author's rhetorical or argumentative style and its relation to effectiveness
- Evaluate a work of protest for effectiveness
- Place zines within an historical context and discuss their impact on current and future modes of protest

Materials

- Access to the Internet, or photocopies of the zine pages from "Elections and Protest: Zines from the Barnard Library Collection"
- Chart paper and markers
- LCD projector and screen

Teacher Preparation

Before class, you might assign students to read any or all of the following support materials which can add to the richness of the class discussion:

- *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine
- *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *The Ballot or the Bullet* by Malcolm X
- Wright, Fred. *The History and Characteristics of Zines*. The Zine and E-Zine Resource Guide. 1997. Available: <http://zinebook.com/resource/wright1.html>



elections and protest

zines from the barnard library collection

- The “About” section of the *Election and Protest: Zines from the Barnard Library Collection* Online Exhibition

If no LCD projector is available, consider photocopying the zine excerpts on overhead transparencies for students to use in their presentations during the **Whole Class Discussion**.

Lesson Sequence

Hook/Motivation (10 minutes): Begin the class by asking students to brainstorm a list of different modes of protesting the status quo that they have learned about in the past. For each mode of protest that the class thinks of, list on the board its aim or purpose, the advantages of this type of protest, and the disadvantages. For example:

Type of Protest	Aim/Purpose	Advantages	Disadvantages
Marching in a picket line (like a Union Strike)	To embarrass and shame a company or business into doing the right thing	Calls attention to a problem People are reluctant to cross it	Company can just hire scabs
Boycotting (like during Civil Rights movement)	To hurt a company financially by refusing to use its product until they change their ways	Calls attention to a problem Hits the company where it hurts	Hard to get enough people to join in order to make a difference Sometimes it hurts the protester because they can't live without the service they're boycotting
Violent Uprising	To physically challenge or destroy something or someone	Stops the problem by destroying its source...	Violence can lead to more violence...

Discuss as many types of protest as the class can come up with, and examine the advantages and disadvantages of each. If possible, ask students to name historical examples of each type or protest. What criteria would you use to evaluate the effectiveness of one of these modes of protest? The number of people affected or influenced, or maybe whether or not the objectionable activity is stopped or overthrown?

Direct Instruction (5-10 minutes): If it has not yet come up, add “Pamphleteering and Self-publishing” to your chart and discuss with students. Ask them if they can think of any historical examples of self-published materials adding to the discourse of a given protest or political movement. Depending on what your students already know and the focus of your course, you might focus the discussion around any or all of the following examples:

- *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine and other Revolutionary American Broad­sides
- The *Samizdat* publications in Russia during the Cold War
- Other pamphleteers and self-publishers related to your course content



elections and protest

zines from the barnard library collection

What is the aim or purpose behind self-publishing protest materials? What are the advantages and disadvantages of protesting in this way?

After ensuring that your students have a basic level of understanding about self-published protest materials, focus the discussion on power. What is the difference between a self-published pamphlet and government propaganda? When it comes to pamphleteering, what makes one self-published work more successful than another?

Tell students that today they will be looking at excerpts from zines of protest that were written within the last few years. Zines, like earlier pamphlets, are self-published works that can express any viewpoint without fear of censorship. The zines they will be looking at today are all focused around political protest and elections, but there are zines on countless other topics and themes as well.

Collaborative Activity (15 minutes): Break students into groups of two or three and ask them to examine one of the zines in this online exhibit. Give the groups 15 minutes to explore the zine online, and answer the following questions:

- What is the author's purpose in writing this zine? Are they simply trying to express themselves, or are they looking to spread an idea or recruit others to join a movement?
- What specific modes of oppression or power structures is the author pushing back against?
- What is the author's style? Confrontational? Sarcastic? Argumentative? Radical? Why did they choose this style?
- How effective is this zine as a mode of protest? Do you feel the final product is successful in meeting the author's purpose or aim?

Each group should be prepared to present their zine to the class and use the projector to show examples of images, words, or phrases that helped lead them to their final conclusions.

Whole Group Discussion (10-20 minutes): Ask each group to present a summary of their zine and their thoughts about its style, purpose, and effectiveness using the LCD projector or overhead transparencies. Discuss as a class how each zine, and zines as a genre, contribute to political discourse by subverting traditional power structures. What do these zines have to teach us about recent and current anti-mainstream movements like riotgrrrl and punk? How do these zines relate to earlier pamphleteering movements, and how they are related (or not related) to blogs and other digital modes of protest?

Summary (5 minutes): Tie the discussion back to the table you created at the beginning of class. How do these zines relate to other modes of protest? What can we glean from these zines about the state of power and protest in America today? Where do your student see resistance and protest playing a role in their lives today?

Lesson Extensions

- Include this lesson within a larger research project focusing on any or all of the following:
 - The use of alternative media as a form of protest

elections and protest

zines from the barnard library collection



- The history of the riotgrrrl movement
- The non-violent protest of the G. W. Bush administration, the Republican National Convention in New York City and the Iraq War
- Challenge students to create their own zines of protest using the zines in this exhibition as models
- Watch, analyze and critique the film, "Do the Right Thing." Examine how the residents of Bed-Stuy use both non-violent and violent protest to achieve their aims. Discuss how the culture of power responds to both approaches, and how effective the protest is in bringing real change to the issue of racial segregation in the neighborhood.