

## Reframing American Democracy

### A 1619 Defining Democracy Activity Toolkit

*These learning activities were created for the Defining Democracy workshop series. Each activity utilizes materials from [The 1619 Project](#) and provides strategies for engaging with the workshop themes. The Defining Democracy series is designed to equip educators with resources and strategies for exploring the theme of American democracy in their classrooms and communities.*

### Structure

During the “Reframing American Democracy Workshop,” educators explored how the Black voices and perspectives centered in *The 1619 Project* help to reframe how we define and teach about democracy in America. The activities in this toolkit provide a strategy for engaging with 1619 Project materials and curricular resources connected to the workshop themes.

- [Activity 1: Teaching About Legacies of Enslavement](#)
  - [Activity 2: Teaching About Democracy in a Conversational Way](#)
  - [Activity 3: Reframing Democracy Education as Collective Memory Work](#)
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## Teaching About Legacies of Enslavement

This is an activity utilizing the essay "[Why Can't We Teach This](#)" by Nikita Stewart to support conversation about best practices for teaching about the legacy of enslavement in American democracy.

### Step 1: Building Personal Connection

- Frame the activity for your participants and ask them to consider an educator in their community who they believe could successfully teach about the legacies of slavery in American democracy.
- Invite participants to share 1-2 of the characteristics and/or teaching habits that led them to consider this educator.
- Introduce "Why Can't We Teach This," an essay that examines the ideologies and trends that have prevented accurate teaching about enslavement and names inadequate teaching about enslavement as educational malpractice.
- Discuss participant responses to this framing. What were they taught about the history of enslavement in the United States, and how was it presented?

### Step 2: Identifying Teaching Trends

- Explain to participants that you will share two excerpts from the essay citing trends in how we teach about enslavement and prompt them to respond, indicating whether the stated trend is reflective of trends within their own school community. (You can incorporate trends about history education from other sources as well.)
- Instruct participants that you would like them to indicate how reflective a trend is of their school community on a scale of 0-5, with 0 being "not so reflective" and 5 being "very reflective."
- Use the [recommended excerpts](#) and any additional trends you've identified from other relevant sources to facilitate the activity.
- Discuss participant takeaways and recording reflections on what their school community is collectively doing well and where they can improve.

### Step 3: Application

- Share the essay text with participants. Read it in full or excerpt the closing paragraphs where Nikita Stewart reflects on listening to a recorded narrative from her [great-grandfather](#) who was formerly enslaved.

- Ask participants to reflect and share the opportunities that exist to include the perspectives of enslaved and formerly enslaved people in their teaching and learning. What might the potential impact be?

## Teaching About Democracy in a Conversational Way

This is an activity utilizing both versions of Jamelle Bouie's essay for The 1619 Project, "[Undemocratic Democracy](#)," from the magazine issue and "Politics," from [A New Origin Story](#), to demonstrate the ways in which conversations about democracy can adapt and the purposes that exist for doing so.

### Step 1: Building Context

- Frame the activity for your participants, using the "[Teaching The 1619 Project](#)" page on the website to explain the relationship between the original magazine publication and the book anthology, *A New Origin Story*.
- Discuss the other ways participants have seen *The 1619 Project* evolve, connecting with new audiences and encouraging new conversations.

### Step 2: Resource Exploration

- Use the relevant summary from the [1619 Project Curriculum Guide](#) to frame the "Politics" essay. Note that the original version of the essay is published in 2019, before the 2020 election, the event in conversation at the beginning and ending of the anthology version.
- Explain to participants that they will have time to review two different paragraphs from "Undemocratic Democracy" that are updated in the "Politics" version of the essay.
- Instruct participants to reflect on the [excerpt comparisons](#) by responding to questions of "What changed with the text edit?," "What remained the same?," and "How might the changes impact audience understanding or engagement with the topic?"
- Provide time for participants to review excerpts independently. Then invite them to share reflections, discussing each of the prompts.

### Step 3: Building Personal Connections

- Ask participants to provide a variety of motivations for the edits we see in the "Politics" essay.
- Name the following motivations if participants do not mention them first: having more space on the page in the book context; better aligning with other book chapters in voice and tone; a desire for increased clarity; response to pushback; the occurrence of new political events.
- Encourage participants to consider what factors might be blocking productive conversation about the legacies of slavery in democracy in their school community and to problem solve around strategic pivots and reframes.

## Reframing Democracy Education as Collective Memory Work

This is an activity using the archival images in [The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story](#) to illustrate how we construct cultural memory and how that influences our understanding of democracy. This activity can also be completed with images from the [original magazine issue](#).

### Step 1: Personal Connection

- Frame the activity for your participants and ask them, "What resources and information from *The 1619 Project* stay most prevalent in your memory?"
- Discuss which elements of the project feel most memorable to participants.

### Step 2: Resource Exploration

- Explain to participants that you will share archival images from *A New Origin Story* and prompt them, after each image, to respond, indicating their familiarity with the image through a number scale. After everyone has had a chance to share, you will let them know the origin of the image.
- Instruct participants on how you would like them to indicate:
  - ◆ 1: I recognize this image and can place it outside of *The 1619 Project*
  - ◆ 2: I recognize this image but cannot place it outside of *The 1619 Project*
  - ◆ 3: I do not recognize this image
- Use the [recommended images](#) and any other images from *The 1619 Project* that might be relevant to your participants to facilitate the activity. You should end with the image of Nikole Hannah-Jones' father, Milton Hannah, from Chapter 1.
- Discuss how the images in *The 1619 Project* help support our understanding of American democratic history. What is the significance of including both personal photographs, like the one of Milton Hannah, alongside the photographs that already have some place in many people's cultural memory?

### Step 3: Group Listening

- [Listen together to Kimberly Annece Henderson](#), the archivist who curated the photos for *A New Origin Story*, speaking about the power of historical archives. (Recording from the "Power and Purpose of Historical Archives" webinar, 17:18-23:47)
- Discuss the impact of the memory work Henderson is doing both within and outside of her work with *The 1619 Project*.
- Encourage participants to reflect on the people and spaces doing memory work in their community. Invite them to share ideas about how they can make more connections to that work within their school community.