

Defining Democracy Grantee Project Collection

About *The 1619 Project*

The 1619 Project illuminates the legacy of slavery in the contemporary United States, and highlights the contributions of Black Americans to every aspect of American society. Since its launch in 2019, *The 1619 Project* and the conversations it has sparked have expanded through new resources, including a podcast, a book-length anthology, a Hulu docuseries, and a children's book.

About *The Defining Democracy Initiative*

The Pulitzer Center champions the power of stories to make complex issues relevant and inspire action. As the original education partner for *The 1619 Project*, which began as a New York Times Magazine special issue in 2019, the Pulitzer Center has supported hundreds of educators in expanding student understanding of the complex origin story of the United States. The Defining Democracy Initiative, launched in anticipation of the United States Semiquincentennial on July 4, 2026, is an invitation to go beyond simply marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by engaging with themes of democracy more deeply. The Pulitzer Center U.S. Education and Outreach Team worked in collaboration with our 1619 Impact Grantees and other educators in our network to refine resources and develop models for teaching and learning about American democracy in both school and community environments.

About This Project Plan

"Democracy How?" is a 1619 Impact Grant project developed by 2025 Grantee, Veronica Jones, and her collaborators at La Unique Bookstore and Cultural Arts Center in Camden County, New Jersey. The project utilizes the La Unique space to cultivate a resource center for intellectual discourse about the ongoing challenges to democracy faced by American citizens. Project activities include: both classroom-based and intergenerational 1619 book studies as well as community events engaging participants with 1619 Project themes and takeaways for their local community.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Summary	“Democracy How?” is a community engagement project with multiple models for cultivating intergenerational community conversations about American history and democracy.
Length of Implementation	This project consisted of a series of community engagements facilitated between October 2025 and January 2026. It included both ongoing activities, like a monthly book club, and individual events.
Project Audience(s)	“Democracy How?” was a community-based project implemented in Camden County, New Jersey. The project used a grassroots, intergenerational approach to explore themes of democracy and American slavery and make connections to the local community context. The target audiences for each key activity were as follows: • <i>1619 Book Club</i>: An intergenerational community audience meeting online • <i>Born on the Water Classroom Engagement</i>: A diverse group of K-12 teachers and students from area schools • <i>1619 Listening Party</i>: An intergenerational audience both within and beyond the local community • <i>1619 Viewing Party and Discussion</i>: A gathering of college student groups and community elders • <i>Historical Symposium</i>: An intergenerational community audience including college students, community members, elders and school aged children
Key Activities	Ongoing Activities • An online book club that met monthly to discuss chapters from <i>The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story</i> • Classroom-based book studies of <i>The 1619 Project</i> picture book, <i>Born on the Water</i> Community Events • A community viewing of <i>1619 Docuseries Episode 1, “Democracy”</i> • An online listening party and discussion of <i>1619 Podcast Episode 2, “The Economy that Slavery Built”</i> • A historical symposium with presentations from local historians, education leaders, and students.

Project Partners	The project facilitators collaborated with a local African American Bookstore and Cultural Arts Center as their home base. La Unique Book Store and Cultural Arts Center provided books to book club and educator participants and hosted the in-person community events. Project facilitators connected with student leaders at Rutgers University and Camden County College to support planning and outreach for the Docuseries Viewing Party. Project facilitators provided books and lesson planning support to classroom educators engaging students with <i>Born on the Water</i>. The final Historical Symposium included presentations by local area historians, a historical museum curator, and a representative from the NJ Amistad Commission who presented teacher and family resources available to support the NJ Amistad Mandate.
1619 Materials	The “Democracy How?” team utilized multiple resources from <i>The 1619 Project</i> and the 1619 Education Materials Collection including: • The 1619 Project: Born on the Water • The Teachers Guide for The 1619 Project: Born on the Water • (Select chapters from) The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story • The 1619 Project Docuseries Episode 1: “Democracy “ • The 1619 Project Docuseries Viewing Guide • The 1619 Project Podcast Episode 2: “The Economy Slavery Built” • The 1619 Podcast Listening Guide
Additional Materials	Additional resources created by project facilitators included: • Sample surveys and reflection forms for community events • A sample school proposal for educators and administrators considering utilizing <i>Born on the Water</i> • Sample Teacher and student reflection forms for <i>Born on the Water</i> • A sample agenda for a <i>Defining Democracy</i> Historical Symposium

ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Online Book Study: <i>A New Origin Story</i>		
Pacing	Goals/Focus	Steps/Approach
September	Audience Outreach: Promoting the Radical Readers Book Club opportunity through La Unique Bookstore, the community college, and other local community hubs..	- Outline the logistics for meeting and remaining in conversation with book club members. Make decisions about which tools you want to utilize given your audience needs and preferences. - The “Democracy How?” team utilized the BookClubs app as their tool for scheduling meetings, tracking reads, and communicating with members. - Set an enrollment deadline and include a pre-survey as a part of the registration so that the team is able to appropriately plan for sessions. - Generate excitement for the opportunity through strategies like book launches and giveaways. Provide information about how to access and purchase additional books including in alternate formats like audiobook. - The La Unique Bookstore gave free copies of <i>The 1619 Project: A New Origins Story</i> to the first 10 people who registered for the book club in the app. - Prepare to capture participant learning through the formulation of guided questions for starting chapters, meeting agendas, and closing surveys. Utilize available 1619 curricular resources like the Pulitzer Center’s 1619 Book Guides and the Stories for Teaching in the Deep South lesson plan to support the development of your agenda and guiding questions.
October & November	Book Club Facilitation: Cultivating a space that allows participating members from a variety of backgrounds to focus their learning and engage in meaningful dialogue.	- Host meetings according to a clear and consistent schedule. The “Democracy How?” team’s book club meetings were 1.5 hours each and paced a week apart with some adjustment in November. The October and November cadence was as follows: - October 1st: “Preface” & “The White Lion” - October 8th: “Democracy” & “Race” - October 15th: “Sugar” & “Dispossession” - October 22nd: “Capitalism” & “Citizenship” - November 5th: “Justice”

		○ November 19th: “Punishment”
December	Book Club Facilitation & Transition: Cultivating a space that allows participating members from a variety of backgrounds to focus their learning and engage in meaningful dialogue. Providing an opportunity for continued learning.	● Host meetings according to a clear and consistent schedule. The “Democracy How?” team’s book club meetings were 1.5 hours each and paced a week apart with some adjustment in November. The December cadence and focus chapters were as follows: ○ December 3rd: “Fear” ○ December 10th: “Church” ● Invite participants to share their learning and reflections with audiences outside of the book club. The “Democracy How?” team invited participants to share reflections at the Historical Symposium. ● Use surveys to gauge participant interest in continuing the book club with either <i>The 1619 Project</i> or another book with aligned themes.
<u>Book Study Outcomes</u> The primary purpose of reading <i>The 1619 Project</i> book with our community was to develop a shared understanding of the central role of slavery in the evolution of democracy in America and to discuss “how” it continues in the future. The group was so engaged with the space that the team decided to continue the book club into 2026, reading other books on hard topics.		

Classroom Book Study: Born on the Water		
Pacing	Goals/Focus	Steps/Approach
September	Planning and Preparation	• Prepare a proposal for educators and administrators who want to learn more about the book and the project. Visit schools/teachers who sign up to discuss planning for <i>Born on the Water</i> with teachers • Create and distribute books and reading guides to participating classes • Provide pre/post participation surveys for both educators and students • Set a deadline for participating teachers to create their <i>Born on the Water</i> lessons/activities so that you can review ahead of implementation in October.
October	Implementation	• Support teachers as needed during their classroom implementation of lessons and activities. Share relevant materials from the 1619 Education Materials Collection to supplement planning.
November	Evaluation	• Collect teacher and student surveys after implementation. Review for ideas on how to improve the collaborations in future.
<u><i>Classroom Book Study Outcomes</i></u> The teachers focused on creating safe and respectful classrooms so that hard conversations could take place. They developed lessons that taught the following skills: how to interpret and “read” illustrations, predicting, drawing conclusions and inference. They also discussed the differences between migration, immigration and enslavement. The challenge given to each teacher was to lead the students to understanding the idea of being born on water. The students documented their learning by writing poems and wrote reflection journals using teacher prompts and their own ideas. Teachers were both encouraged and surprised to find that the students of all backgrounds were very open to learning about slavery and really connected to the trauma and resilience of enslaved people. The teachers gained confidence in their ability to teach about enslavement and build student understanding. Having support for teachers is critical for this type of teaching and learning.		

1619 Docuseries Viewing Party: Episode 1, “Democracy”

Steps/Approach

- Outline event logistics including viewing location, time, and registration process. Design both digital and physical flyers for event promotion.
- Research any permissions needed to screen an episode of the docuseries in an educational setting. The *Democracy How?* team watched episode 1 on Hulu.
- Reach out to community partners and campus leaders for support with audience outreach. Advertise the event through (evite flyer, instagram, website, community outreach, teacher/student participation)
- Prepare supplies. Make copies of the [Docuseries Viewing Guides](#) from the 1619 Education Materials Collection. Purchase refreshments and any other supplies needed for the event.
- Distribute online pre-viewing survey to all participants
- Host the 1619 docuseries showing, providing refreshments either before viewing or between the viewing and conversation.
- Facilitate a group discussion about the episode following the viewing.
- Distribute online post-viewing survey to all participants

1619 Podcast Listening Party: Episode 2, “The Economy Slavery Built”

Steps/Approach

- Outline event logistics including meeting platform and registration process. Design both digital and physical flyers for event promotion.
- Reach out to community partners and campus leaders for support with audience outreach. Advertise the event through (evite flyer, instagram, website, community outreach, teacher/student participation)
- Prepare supplies. Make copies of the [Podcast Listening Guides](#) from the 1619 Education Materials Collection. Email and share Podcast links with registered participants.
- Distribute online pre-viewing survey to all participants
- Host the 1619 podcast listening party
- Facilitate a group discussion about the episode following the viewing.
- Distribute online post-viewing survey to all participants

Historical Symposium
Steps/Approach
• Draft an event agenda with ideal dates, speakers and times • Reach out to potential speakers to confirm their interest and availability • Once the schedule is finalized, advertise the event through all available channels and require registration. If possible, share the event through local press channels. • Meet with speakers to review their presentations and address and concerns. • Prepare supplies including light refreshments. • Host event and provide participants with a follow up survey.
<u>Historical Seminar Outcomes</u>
The <i>Democracy How?</i> Historical Seminar was well attended. It was promoted through La Unique Bookstore channels and advertised in a local newspaper, the Anointed News Paper. The full day event included historians who spoke on topics such as the creation of the Declaration of Independence, The US Constitution and The Emancipation Proclamation and the intersection of the question of slavery in America. The event also featured a presentation by a historian and museum curator who shared actual artifacts used during the transatlantic slave route and on US plantations to control black bodies. Frederick Douglas’ speech, “What to the Slave is the 4th of July” was read by an intergenerational trio (a 10 year old, 30 year old and 50 year old)! A representative from the NJ Amistad Commission who presented teacher and family resources they had available and the NJ Amistad Mandate. The team provided food and beverages and there was plenty of time for conversation and Q & A.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Reach

This project, managed by 4 active team members, reached 375 students and educators as well as the wider community.

Additional Notes

This community engagement project was developed as a new idea in response to the 1619 Impact Grant and was a very heavy lift. Having a great team was critical and this would have been a failure without each of us. In addition to our team members, we learned how important it is to meet face to face with school stakeholders early on and have written press releases to share with journalists and media outlets. We publicized events through the bookstore webpage entitled Democracy_How2025 and distributed flyers to local community college, local churches, the Camden City School Board of Education, and neighborhood businesses. There were invitations to the events posted on the La Unique Book Store & Cultural Arts Center website and each person who shopped at the bookstore received a flyer with their purchase.

In the end we learned that 1) this was very important and 2) this was doable. I was surprised about the push back concerning *Born on the Water* in primarily black and brown spaces but strong relationships, consistency, and positive attitudes went a long way. Providing educators with easy entry points and clear communication to dissipate the fear around teaching about slavery was paramount.

My advice for other educators or community leaders hoping to implement a similar project would be:

- Design a project that can be done without the funding, and then develop ideas around what could be expanded with additional financial support.
- Make sure you have a committed team. Think about skill sets and temperaments when deciding who should lead each aspect
- Meet with stakeholders and collaborators in person if you can - it could make all the difference.
- Make sure you teach and use a protocol for teaching hard history
- Use local and statewide resources (they are willing to come out and bring information). Don't forget your local historical societies and museums
- Advertise, advertise, advertise! (print, internet and word of mouth)
- Enjoy the learning! (I sure did)