Lesson Plan Twelve: Sit–Ins

11th & 12th Grade

2 class periods and 1 homework assignment

Introduction.

There is a long history in America of sit-ins being used by workers, students and civil rights activists occupying factories, universities, government offices and diners. Sit-ins and occupying a building peacefully have often been an effective but sometimes controversial way of forcing change.

Objective.

Students will investigate a number of sit-ins in American history from 1936 to the present, looking at the conditions that sparked the protests and determining their success or failure. They will then consider the moral and legal questions raised and determine whether sit-ins are a legitimate way of trying to bring about change.

Tools Required - Computer, Internet access, printer.

Historical Vocabulary.

A sit-in or sit-down is a form of direct action that involves one or more persons nonviolently occupying an area for a protest, often to promote political, social, or economic change. In sit-ins, protesters usually seat themselves at some strategic location (inside a restaurant, in a street to block it, in a government or corporate office, and so on). They remain until they are evicted, usually by force, or arrested, or until their requests have been met. Sit-ins have historically been a highly successful form of protest because they cause disruption that draws attention to the protest and by proxy the protesters' cause. They are a non-violent way to effectively shut down an area or business. The forced removal of protesters, and sometimes the use of violence against them, often arouses sympathy from the public, increasing the chances of the demonstrators reaching their goal. (Adapted from Wikipedia)
Procedures.

Day One.

Introductory Activity  5-10 minutes

Pose the following question to your students: “Do you think that it is ok for people to take over a building to protest something? Could you imagine taking over your school if there was something important that you thought was wrong at school? What kind of issues might justify such an action?” Have students journal answers and then discuss them as a class. Record their responses on a blackboard or large piece of chart paper and then compare the differences in their answers.

Mini Lesson  10 minutes

Ask the students if they can identify any significant laws or important changes in society that were partly brought about through sit-ins. Ask them to identify other forms of non-violent protest and consider whether they think that they can be effective. Have they ever been involved in any of these kinds of actions? Was it/would it be exciting or scary or both? Record their responses and discuss.

Explain to students that many different groups of people – unions, workers, students, civil rights workers and people being discriminated against – have used sit-ins to try to change something that they felt was wrong. Now explain that they are about to listen to an MP4 file about three different kinds of sit-ins that a singer called Barbara Dane was involved in. Ask them to think about the similarities and differences represented in the three situations.

Individual Research  30 minutes

Now have the students download the MP4 file at …………………………………
Have them watch the footage and/or listen to the voices.

Print and hand out Student Worksheet: Sit Ins (page 3) for students to use in their Individual Research, instructing them to consider the questions using the indicated web sites and to make notes that they will use in their homework assignment.

Conclusion  5 minutes

Have the students come back together as a group. Ask them what they learned about sit-ins. Which groups do they think were justified, and which not? Which actions seemed to work, and which didn’t?

Explain to students that tonight they will write an essay about how to organize and run a sit-in: how would they make the sit in successful and gain public support, Print and hand out Student Homework: Organize a Sit In (page 4).
Student Worksheet: Sit-Ins

For each question, visit the recommended website(s) to answer the question. Write 3-4 sentences answering the question based off what you read on those sites.

• Why did car workers occupy their factory in Flint, Michigan in 1936 and did they win?
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8x1_q9wg58
  http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/index.php#

• What were sit-ins during the civil rights movement trying to achieve?
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYq5JzN4qI (diners from 1:48 poor quality)
  http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/959071

• Why did students take over Columbia University in 1968 and were they successful?
  http://www.archive.org/details/Columbia1969 (from about 5:20)
  http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968/

• Investigate the sit-in at Republic Doors and Windows in 2009.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gwWcdWp7qA Republic

If you have time, check out other pages on these sites or find your own sites as well.
If you discover websites that helped in your research, send them to us at ianruskin@theharrybridgesproject.org and say “Lesson Plan Sites” in the subject line. Also let us know if any of the sites that we have supplied have shut down. Include your name and your school’s name and we will add your information to the Education Project!
Imagine that you have been given the job of organizing a sit-in campaign at a car wash that doesn’t pay any wages to the workers. Consider your strategy in terms of length of time, degree of disruption, behavior of your protesters, etc. and how to keep public opinion on your side. Write a 250-word essay that will inspire people to join you and include at least one comparison to an earlier American sit-in or occupation.
Day Two

Introductory Activity  5 minutes

Explain that today the students are going to share their essays with each other in small groups and then discuss with the class what they have learned from their research and writing. Ask them whether it was easy or difficult to write the essay, and what helped or hindered them.

Group Activity  30 minutes

Have the students break up into groups of 4 or 5 and write a short (2 or 3 minute) play in which they imagine a setting where a sit in would be appropriate in our age. Have them discuss what the sit in is about and how they would make their point. Give students ten minutes to brainstorm and 20 minutes to put on their short plays.

Teacher Led Discussion  10-15 minutes

Lead a discussion about what they have learned, using some of the following questions:

- What surprised you the most about your research?
- Are sit-ins something that America should be proud of or not?
- Are sit-ins a sign of democracy or not?
- What are the things about the sit-in you “organized” last night that would make it successful?
- What are the negative things about sit-ins?
- Are there any situations in America today that would justify sit-ins?
- Would you be willing to go to jail for a situation that you felt was wrong?
- Did you find any other useful web sites?

Conclusion  5 minutes

Explain that our attitudes to different forms of protest are complicated and can bring up many different viewpoints. People sometimes agree with the aim but not the method of sit-ins, but at the same time they are often successful in bringing about change.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Development of Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Use of Language</th>
<th>Sentence Structure</th>
<th>Grammar and Word Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No plausible position is taken on the topic; severely lacking in examples, reasons and/or evidence</td>
<td>Disorganized; little or no focus; incoherent</td>
<td>Contains fundamental vocabulary mistakes</td>
<td>Severely flawed sentence structure</td>
<td>Grammar and word usage are so poor that they interfere with meaning; very poor mechanics (like punctuation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Position on topic is unclear or extremely limited; inappropriate examples or reasons</td>
<td>Poorly organized; lacks focus; problems with coherence or flow of ideas</td>
<td>Poor use of language; indicates very limited vocabulary and poor word choice</td>
<td>Frequent problems with sentence structure</td>
<td>Grammar and word usage mistakes are frequent and interfere with meaning; poor mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Position on topic demonstrates critical thinking skill applied inconsistently; inadequate examples, reasons or evidence</td>
<td>Limited in organization and focus; demonstrates lapses in coherence or flow of ideas</td>
<td>Displays developing use of language; contains indications of weak vocabulary and poor word selection</td>
<td>Some problems with sentence structure; lacks a variety of sentence structures</td>
<td>Contains many mistakes in grammar word usage and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Position on topic demonstrates competent critical thinking skill; example, reasons and evidence are good</td>
<td>Generally organized and focused; demonstrates some coherence and attention to the flow of ideas</td>
<td>Displays adequate use of language; vocabulary used is generally appropriate</td>
<td>Good sentence structure; demonstrates some variety of sentence structure</td>
<td>Contains few mistakes in grammar, word usage and mechanics</td>
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This Lesson Plan was developed by Ian Ruskin, Director, The Harry Bridges Project and Education Consultants Kara Hunter and Karen Mowrer.

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Thank You!