



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2008 Volume IV: Representations of Democracy in Literature, History and Film

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## **Democracy: the Rule of the People by the People**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.04.07  
by Marialuisa Sapienza

This unit is primarily focused on the understanding and interpretation of democracy and its related imperfections -- corruption and/or manipulation -- through a series of different literary and visual documents from Aristotle up to now. It will start with the following essential questions: What is your interpretation of democracy? What is the most important aspect of democracy? The students will study the concept of "democracy" and will be authentic researchers whose goal is to become independent thinkers aware of their own environment. The unit will include: *An Agent, a Green Card, and a Demand for Sex* by Nina Bernstein, excerpts from Aristotle's *Politics* and *Julius Caesar* by W. Shakespeare, George Caleb Bingham's election paintings, *America* and *Let America Be America Again* by Langston Hughes, *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, one excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* by Frank Capra. The unit will also require various writing activities -- quick writes, class discussions, analytical essays, written responses, revisions by peers and editing activities -- and a final project that will be in the form of a documented essay and a presentation, or a simple documented visual for those students who have special needs.

(Recommended for English and A.P. Literature and Composition and A.P. Language and Composition, grades 11 and 12)

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