



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

Dissent in Democracy: Subverting the Dominant Paradigm

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.04.01
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This unit takes the form of a five-week intensive survey of those individuals who, over the course of the United States' history as a free country, have advocated social and political reform by exercising the right to free speech. Due to the timeless quality of the readings chosen to illustrate these lessons, I believe this unit will work well not only with my own ninth-grade English classes, but with almost any high school American literature or history class. This course is not comprehensive, that is to say some significant American reformers and activists are left out. Therefore, it is my hope that teachers intending to integrate this unit into their own curriculum do not follow it to the letter, but take from it what they believe will pique the curiosities of their respective learners, and add their own choices for readings and viewings based on their own personal interests and areas of knowledge. The challenge in teaching this unit is making students who would be otherwise reluctant or apathetic become interested and invested in our nation's political process. By combating the twin evils of apathy and ignorance, teachers can help defeat those who wish to subvert the spirit of popular sovereignty. As Jimmy Carter once said, "[We] ought to remember the oath that Thomas Jefferson and others took when they practically signed their own death warrant, writing the *Declaration of Independence* -- to preserve justice and equity and freedom and fairness, they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor." It is just this sort of sentiment that this unit hopes to instill in students.

(Recommended for American Literature and History, grades 9-12)

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