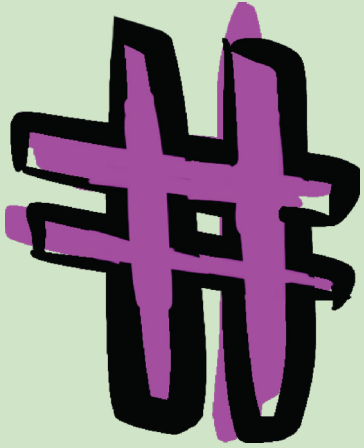
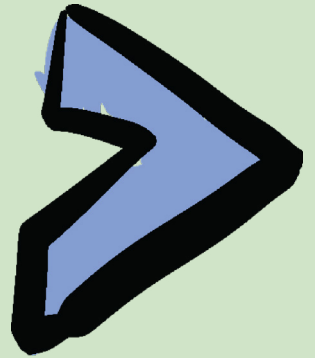


# TAKING ACTION BEYOND THE BALLOT!



CENTERING STUDENT  
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT  
IN REMOTE LEARNING



## THIS ARTICLE COVERS THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

-  Meeting Your Students Where They're At
-  Building Community From Afar
-  Supporting Student Protest
-  Incorporating Current Events & Analyzing Media Bias
-  Tools for Understanding Power
-  Art and Activism
-  Using Your Platform as an Educator
-  Imagining Neighborhood Futures

# TAKING ACTION BEYOND THE BALLOT!

## CENTERING STUDENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN REMOTE LEARNING

We know it's an overwhelming time to be an educator right now. Supporting students during nationwide protests against police brutality and a global pandemic is more difficult when we can't be in the room together. Supporting student civic engagement helps young people understand how they can get involved and take action on the issues that matter most to them. We've compiled a list of best practices, activity ideas, and links to resources to help you build community from afar, uplift young voices, and channel student creativity into informed and empowered civic action!

At CUP, we believe that civic engagement means more than voting. In fact, many of the young people we collaborate with aren't old enough to cast a ballot. And to be honest, many of the issues that matter most to us and the people we care about are never put to a vote. So, how can we empower students to take on these issues?

We start from the belief that the places where we live are the products of decision-making and power. When students better understand how these systems work, who's involved, and who's impacted, they're more equipped to get involved in the decisions that impact their communities. As students become more civically engaged, they learn how to apply their own strengths, interests, and convictions to shape the future of their communities. These resources have been designed with high school students in mind, but many of these activities can be adapted for younger students.

Young people have always been on the frontlines of social change, challenging the status quo, and imagining a better world. Let's help them do that right now!

If you do any of these activities we'd love to know. Email us at [info@welcometocup.org](mailto:info@welcometocup.org) so we can amplify your students' creativity!"



# MEETING YOUR STUDENTS WHERE THEY'RE AT

It's hard to address students' needs in the classroom, without addressing how this current political moment is impacting students' socially and emotionally. Centering students' emotional and physical safety is always important, and right now that means showing up for the needs of students from communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, violent policing, and economic insecurity. To support the mental health of Black and Brown students, and students from low-income communities, we recommend centering these five principles of [trauma-informed practices](#).

**Safety:** Creating an environment where young people can develop positive relationships with staff and other youth that support their physical, emotional, and cultural safety. This could look like setting up accountability practices such as community agreements that make students feel comfortable enough to take risks, and restorative practices such as circles, in case any harm is done in the classroom.

**Choice:** Giving young people autonomy and the ability to make choices in activities and develop their curiosity. In the activities outlined below, you'll find multiple ways for young people to get involved based on their interests.

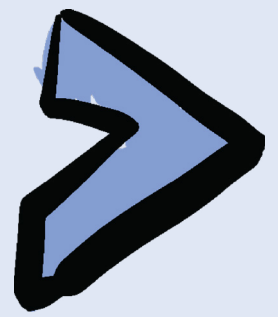
**Collaboration:** Intentionally working to make all young people feel like they belong and have a say in the class.

**Trustworthiness:** Creating programming that is predictable and consistent. When young people know what to expect when they arrive to class, they feel safe to engage more deeply.

**Empowerment:** Creating programming that lifts up the voices and experiences of young people. We believe that young people are the experts of their own experiences. Giving them opportunities to share their voices and express their truth allows for young people to develop resilience and self confidence.

In the following sections, we explore practices and strategies that incorporate these principles to help establish a distanced learning community in which students feel safe and supported. For more information on how to incorporate trauma-informed practices in your programming, check out the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#).





# BUILDING COMMUNITY FROM AFAR

Not being physically present with our students is a major obstacle to building community. This is made even more difficult when students have unequal access to technology. We know that building community isn't easy, but here are a few things you can do to help your students feel more connected to each other.

**Check the Tech:** Check in with students about their access to technology and internet. Assume there will be different levels of access, so make sure there are options for how to access content and participate. Given there's no one size-fits-all solution, we hope these strategies can help you develop a system that works for you and your students.

- **Vary the format** of class and how students are expected to collaborate (e.g., video chat, conference call, online chat, text chain).
- **Give students options** on how to complete and submit assignments.
- **Lean into the technology limitations** that students face. They may inspire some creative activities (e.g., students could hold a mock debate over text; challenge students to recreate an historical portrait using household items and a mobile phone camera, etc.)

**Communicate:** Create a buddy system and phone tree to follow up with students. This will save you time when communicating with students and help reinforce collaboration and accountability among student groups. We also suggest setting up regularly recurring "office hours" for students each week, and scheduling a few one-on-one sessions with your students every day.

**Collaborate:** Create project-specific small groups that can work independently and report back to the larger class at assigned deadlines. Small groups also allow you to assign individual roles and responsibilities to each group member to make sure the whole group is accountable and contributing. Small groups develop independence by allowing for student choice and encouraging collaboration. This also gives you time to check in on individual groups and provide specialized support. Ultimately, this type of small group work will save you time, deepen student learning, and empower students to engage in creative and collaborative problem-solving.

**Connect:** Connect your students to other civically-engaged youth-led campaigns for social justice. Organizations such as [Teens Take Charge](#) and [Integrate NYC](#) are just two examples of youth-led organizations that are fighting for a more just future for young people in NYC. Connecting your students to other young activists provides a meaningful way to engage cynicism about whether real change can happen. These opportunities also offer students tangible ways to get involved right now with other young leaders.



# SUPPORTING STUDENT PROTEST

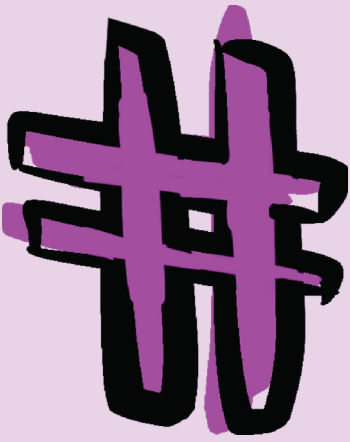
Young people, and students in particular, have always played a major role in movements for justice and liberation. We understand that many students feel compelled to take to the streets to protest. If your students are motivated to protest, you can support them to do so safely.

## This could take several forms:

- Devoting classroom time to allow students to organize buddy systems and phone trees to make sure they are all safe and in communication
- Ensuring that every student has an emergency contact or point person to contact in case they are arrested or in need of medical assistance
- Giving students who want to participate various options for engagement such as creating signs, finding local direct actions, showing up with snacks, and organizing potential [jail support](#)
- Providing students with information on how to [protect themselves](#) and [know what their rights](#) are when they choose to protest.

## After protesting, you can support students to reflect on their experiences by:

- Holding space to process the emotions that came up for them
- Encouraging students to write a journal reflection about their protest experience
- Having students compare their experiences of protesting with other first hand accounts from protests of previous eras
- Asking students to think through the protest experience through each of the five senses
- Having students map their protest and write a narrative for different sections of that protest
- Asking students to create a comic or [zine](#) about how to protest safely (don't forget to add visuals!)



# INCORPORATING CURRENT EVENTS & ANALYZING MEDIA BIAS

Analyzing current events and news media helps students connect their own experiences to a larger context and also helps them ask questions that improve their critical thinking skills. You can encourage students to ask questions like:  
Who's being quoted and what's their perspective on the issue?  
How much decision-making power does this person have?  
How are different media outlets covering the same issue?

These types of questions encourage students to lean into controversial and complex topics like defunding the police and public safety. We've created a series of [activities](#) that can help your students think more critically about media coverage.

As students research the issue, encourage them to express their own perspectives—for example, by recording an op-ed or writing a letter to the Editor.

**Here are some other ideas to make news articles a little more creative for students:**

- Draw a major takeaway from the article
- Create a short comic depicting a day in the life of somebody quoted in the article
- Imagine one of the people quoted in the article got their way. Draw what the world would look like 20 years from now if they get what they are fighting for
- Turn the different perspectives of stakeholders into social media memes

## Where do they stand?



Totally against it

In-between / Undecided

Totally for it



You can download the resource below at CUP's website: [welcometocup.org/Projects/TeacherTrainings/TakingActionBeyondTheBallot](http://welcometocup.org/Projects/TeacherTrainings/TakingActionBeyondTheBallot)



# TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING POWER

Identifying who's involved in decision-making, what power they have, and how they use it, can help students better understand the current social and political moment.

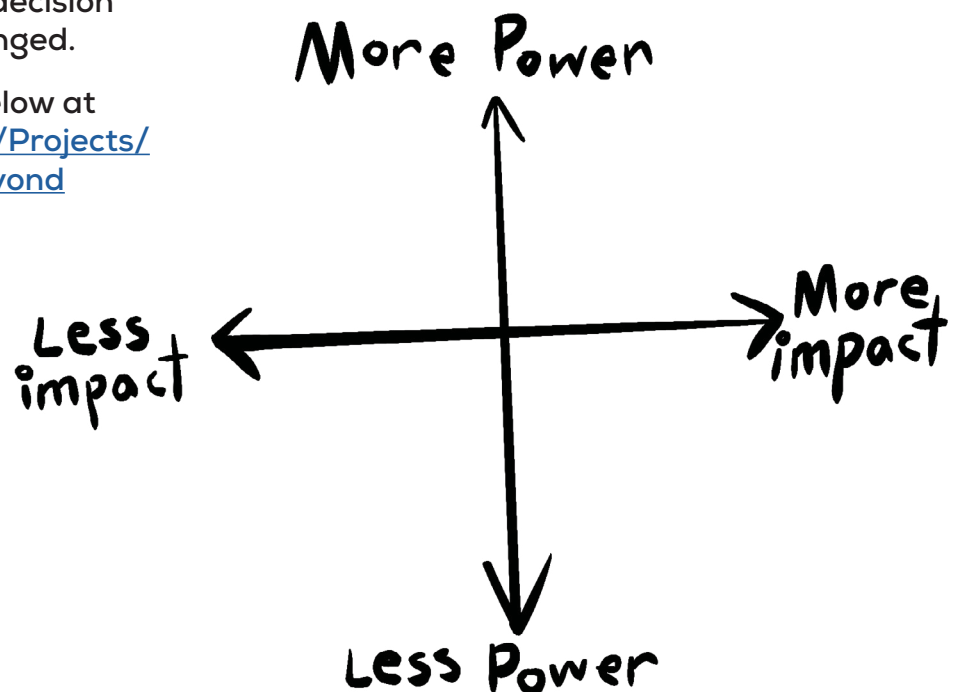
We've adapted a grassroots organizing tool called a ["Power Map"](#) to help students take a deeper look at issues impacting their community, the people involved, and the role they play in the issue. By visualizing the different levels of power stakeholders hold, students can understand who's impacted and how they can get involved. This activity helps students better understand different forms of power and how individuals can build power by working collectively. Diagramming stakeholders also reinforces the idea that our cities and communities are products of decision making, and therefore can be changed.

You can download the resource below at CUP's website: [welcometocup.org/Projects/TeacherTrainings/TakingActionBeyondTheBallot](http://welcometocup.org/Projects/TeacherTrainings/TakingActionBeyondTheBallot)

WHO'S GOT THE POWER?

WHO DECIDES?

HOW CAN WE BUILD POWER?





# ART AND ACTIVISM

Art and design have always played a key role in civic action and the fight for social justice. Not only can art mobilize the heart, minds, and imagination of the public, it can also help students process complicated feelings. Artmaking offers students a powerful way to express themselves when they can't find the words and discover how their own strengths and interests can be channeled into creative forms of civic action. We've included a step-by-step activity to help your students explore how to meet the needs of their community through creative problem solving and artmaking (see [Imagining Neighborhood Futures](#)). Below are a few more ideas for artmaking that students can do from home and we've included some links to examples to get you started:

## Visual Art

Have students research [protest art](#) from past social justice movements, and encourage them to update the message and visuals to speak to the issues for today. For example, to highlight racist police brutality, Artist Dread Scott updated an [anti-lynching flag](#) that once hung outside the NAACP's offices.

## Writing & Poetry

Have students choose an article from a physical newspaper. Ask students to use a dark marker and [redact all, but a few of the words](#) in the article to remix the content. Students may want to make a poem, create a picture, or re-write the content to highlight something unsaid. For example, in [Counternarratives](#), Artist Alexandra Bell uses redaction, annotation, and re-wording to reconstruct newspaper articles to highlight their racist bias.

You can also do this activity remotely with students by copying and pasting the text of a news article into a Google Doc (or some alternative) and then using the highlight function to redact portions of the text.

## Performance

Encourage students to create a [PSA](#) by researching a specific call to action and creating a script that breaks down a complex policy issue. Bonus points for catchy slogans, humor, dance, and ingenuity! This type of activity empowers students to teach others by creating an accessible introduction to complex ideas. Check out this [mock infomercial](#) starring Neisy Nash that uses humour to counter racists fear and white fragility.

## Public Art

Even though engaging with public art may not be easy in a time of social distancing, you can still challenge students to think about the role public art plays in our neighborhoods. Students could design a [mural](#) for their [community](#), create a monument to something they love about their neighborhood, or a memorial to an undertold history. For example, this [statute](#) by Artist Kehinde Wiley questions the role of historic monuments and the narratives they privilege (and those they erase). And for more information about the process of creating public art, check out the CUP student project [Whose Art?](#) which explores how communities can bring public art into their neighborhood and offers a guide for students to brainstorm their own public art ideas.

## Bringing it all together

Regardless of the art activity, it's important to display students' work publicly and have them convene together to discuss the body of work they created. Doing so enables you to spark dialogue among students and help them reflect on their creative process. There are lots of ways to do this! For example you can create a virtual gallery on social media using a specific hashtag or upload students' work to a collaborative blog. (If you do any of these activities, please let us know! We'd love to amplify your students' creativity!)





# USING YOUR PLATFORM AS AN EDUCATOR

As educators we have a platform and a responsibility to support our students. There are [lots of ways](#) we can integrate social justice work into our teaching practices. Here are just a few things that you can do to show up for your students and their futures:

- If you're a teacher, and especially if you're white, and you choose to protest, identify yourself as a teacher. The world needs to see teachers declare loudly and clearly, Black Lives Matter.
- If you're a member of a teachers' union, you can mobilize union members to demand policy action such as getting police out of schools and directing more funding for counselors and the arts.
- Diversify your curriculum by including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ voices.
- Work with teachers across subject matter to integrate lessons and projects that confront social injustice and spark civic engagement.
- Incorporate [restorative justice practices](#), in your class and schoolwide.
- Create space for students to have informed debates and disagreements.
- Help students amplify their voices on issues that matter to them both in and outside the classroom.



**Goal:** Students will better understand how their own strengths and interests can help meet the needs of their community through creative problem solving and artmaking.

**Time:** 1 hour

**Materials:** Blank pieces of paper, Pencil (at least 1), Pens or Markers (at least 1)

**Modification for Remote Learning:** Students can work together remotely by sharing their work over video chat. You can also use a combination of text tools like a shared Google Doc and collaborative drawing tools like aggie.io (or some equivalent).



# IMAGINING NEIGHBORHOOD FUTURES

## INSTRUCTIONS:

**Ask: What is a social issue that is important to you? (20 mins)**

1. Brainstorm ideas. Write down as many ideas that come to you.
2. Share out your ideas to your small group.
3. In a small group or with a partner, take a few minutes to circle the one or two issues that are the most important for you. Remember to discuss why these issues are important to you.

**Ask: What does this look like in your community? (7 mins)**

4. Sketch an example of what this issue looks like with a pencil. Make sure you include at least one person in your sketch. Bonus points if you include a speech or thought bubble in your image!

**Ask: What is missing from this issue that could make a difference? What change would you make? (8 mins)**

5. Use a pen or marker to draw what's missing. You can draw this directly on top of your previous sketch, or use a new piece of paper to sketch what's missing.

**Ask: How can we create what is missing in an art project? (25 mins)**

6. Write down your strengths: talking, writing, singing, performing, drawing, designing, taking pictures, playing sports, collaborating, organizing, interviewing, researching, healing, etc.
7. In your small group, or with a partner, brainstorm how you can apply any or all of these into an art project that helps to create what's missing. What does collaboration look like?

**Optional Extension:** What action steps do we need to take to make this art project a reality? Learn more about [social practice art](#) - art that engages community members to think about social issues in new ways. How can you collaborate with other community stakeholders? Who do we need to talk to? Who needs to be included? What information do we need to know to move forward? Find out more information and revise your art project!



# CREDITS

This educator guide was produced by the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP).

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities. For more information about CUP, visit [welcometoCUP.org](http://welcometoCUP.org).

## CUP

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