



Planting Seeds

Subject Areas: Social Studies, English/Language Arts, Science, Black History, Women’s History, US History

Learning Objectives:

- To recognize an underrepresented historical figure as a community helper
- To learn about the connection between voting rights and the democratic form of government
- To enhance vocabulary (see glossary within Planting Seeds)
- To understand how a life unfolds in time (see [timeline](#))
- To consider the connection between literal and figurative modes of representing ideas
- To learn more about plant life cycles
- To recognize oneself as a potential community helper

Necessary Materials:

- Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode, available for free on the Find Your Voice website
- Smithsonian Folkways, “Songs My Mother Taught Me.” [Selected songs](#) available on YouTube
- Planting Seeds: The Life and Legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer by Maegan Parker Brooks, PhD
- Small pots (one per student), potting soil, and sunflower seeds
- Protest Plants Handout
- Discussion questions (provided within)

Background Knowledge:

You may wish to enhance/refresh your own knowledge by consulting this [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) before introducing the “Planting Seeds” unit.

Instruction Steps:

Anticipatory Set

Step One: To pique student interest, you can show the Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode or play a song Hamer sang from the “Songs My Mother Taught Me” album.

Step Two: Read Planting Seeds: The Life and Legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer to the class. This book is written with a

simple rhyme structure that will appeal to young learners, but it might be helpful for you to read it aloud a few times to yourself first to perfect the cadence.

Guided Practice

Step Three: Work through the following discussion questions as a class, returning to the Planting Seeds text. The glossary from Planting Seeds and the timeline linked above could be particularly helpful here. You might also provide additional background information from your own reading of the lengthier biographical sketch. Consider recording student responses to question number three (below) on a piece of chart paper that you can post in the classroom and come back to throughout the school year.

Planting Seeds Discussion Questions:

1. America is a democracy. In a democracy, each person should have the right to vote. Why would someone want to take this right away from someone else? Why is it important for democracies to protect all people’s right to vote?
2. Fannie Lou Hamer thought that every person in America also had the right to education, food and shelter. Why are these rights important in a democracy? How can we help provide education, food, and shelter in our own communities?
3. In Fannie Lou Hamer’s community, many people worked on farm land. When farm machines were introduced, many people lost their jobs. Without jobs, those farmers could not buy food or pay for places to live. So she started a community farm where people could share their resources and use their skills as farmers to grow food and make money.

What changes are happening right now in your community? While changes can be good for some, they might bring problems for others. Are there problems that need to be solved in your community? How can you be like Fannie Lou--using your skills and resources to help solve these community problems?

Activities

Step Four: The activities described below move from the literal to the figurative to help make abstract ideas tangible for early learners. The activities combine Social Studies, ELA, and Science learning objectives.

A. If your class is already engaged in a standard life cycle curriculum, this assignment could build upon their existing knowledge by planting sunflower seeds in small pots. Students could then observe and care for their plants throughout the school year. You could note the relevance of sunflowers to Hamer's story, as Fannie Lou Hamer hails from Sunflower County, Mississippi.

B. As students water their plants, place them in the light, and weed them as necessary, you can lead the class in a discussion about metaphors--those figures of speech that carry across meaning from the realm of tangible knowledge to things we are less certain about.

For instance, you might ask the class: what is "perseverance"? What does "perseverance" look like? Abstract ideas might be difficult for young learners to concretize. They can, however, readily describe the process of how plants grow. Describing community activism as a process of planting seeds and diligently caring for them could, therefore, be a useful way for students to understand how Fannie Lou Hamer persevered throughout her life and activist career. The category of "activist" is also a great extension of community helper curriculum standards for early learners.

Issues of economic justice and political representation motivated Fannie Lou Hamer's community activism. You can ask your students the series of questions

described in number three (above) to identify issues your students are passionate about within their own communities. Then, students can construct their own figurative "plants" by filling in the outline of a sunflower with a protest slogan which advocates for an issue they are passionate about. For example, the metaphorical seeds Hamer planted grew into: "Justice for All," "Black Lives Matter," "Educational Equality," and "Civil Rights are Human Rights." This handout can be accessed here and copied for your class.

Find Your Voice Highlights

Early learners will find their voices through this unit by drawing inspiration from Hamer's activism, considering problems within their own communities, and creating protest slogans to bring greater awareness to these problems. In this manner, students will come to recognize their potential to become community helpers, who advocate for a more just world.

Assessment of Student Learning: Students will improve their reading comprehension by working through guided questions about the book, *Planting Seeds*, with their teacher. Students will gain hands-on experience studying a plant's life cycle by planting sunflower seeds and caring for their plants throughout the year. Students will create their own protest slogan posters.

Lesson Plan Author: Maegan Parker Brooks, PhD

Brooks is a professor at Willamette University. She earned her PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she wrote a dissertation about Fannie Lou Hamer. Her dissertation became a rhetorical biography of Hamer, [A Voice that Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement](#). Brooks also co-edited the first collection of Hamer's speeches, [The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell it Like It Is](#) (with Davis W. Houck). Her third book, *Fannie Lou Hamer: America's Freedom Fighting Woman*, will join Rowman & Littlefield's Library of African American Biography in February 2021. Brooks is a board member of the Fannie Lou Hamer Statue and Education Fund Committee, a lead researcher for the film *Fannie Lou Hamer's America*, editor of the Find Your Voice K-12 curriculum, and the director of the Find Your Voice: Online Resource for Fannie Lou Hamer Studies website. Brooks has two elementary-aged children and loves volunteering in their classrooms.





Protest Plant Handout

Describe a community problem that you would like to fix:

Protest Plants: Fill in the outline of this sunflower plant with your very own protest slogan. This slogan should help bring awareness to the community problem you would like to fix.

For example, the metaphorical seeds Fannie Lou Hamer planted grew into protest slogans like: "Justice for All," "Black Lives Matter," "Educational Equality," and "Civil Rights are Human Rights."

