Episode 2: Voices in the Hall

Lesson Title: Civic Trailblazers

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Episode Description:

Voices in the Hall explores how diverse Coloradans fought for representation, civic participation and expanded civil rights across multiple generations. Connecting early struggles for inclusion with modern movements that reshaped Colorado's political and social landscape through interviews with disability advocates, supported by accessibility subject matter experts, illuminating how Colorado became a focal point of disability justice.

Episode Inquiry Questions:

1. What strategies have people and communities used to influence change in Colorado? What were the outcomes of civic engagement?
2. Why is it important that diverse voices are heard by communities, as well as local and state government officials?
3. Why is it important for those most impacted by an issue to be involved in creating solutions?

Lesson Description:

This lesson explores the history of civic activism in Colorado, examining how diverse individuals and groups have shaped the state's political and social landscape through grassroots organizing and advocacy. By analyzing primary sources, students will investigate key figures and movements. Through a collaborative station-rotation model, students will evaluate specific trailblazers' strategies to understand the multigenerational process of civic engagement. Ultimately, this lesson empowers students to recognize their own potential for agency, connecting historical struggles to contemporary opportunities for creating lasting, equitable changes in their own community.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

4th Grade/60 minutes

Lesson Inquiry Question:

1. How have groups of people and individuals worked to create change in Colorado?

Supporting Questions:

1. Who are some of the civic trailblazers in Colorado that have helped to create positive change in our state?
2. How did these individuals and groups of people work to create change?
3. What have been some of the lasting impacts of the actions of these trailblazers?

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify groups and individuals who have made positive changes in our state and compare the ways they worked to create change.
2. Students will be able to analyze a variety of primary sources (interviews, images, newspaper articles, and oral histories) to understand the impacts of these groups and individuals in Colorado.
3. Students will describe the lasting impacts these groups and individuals have had on Colorado.
4. Students will be able to connect the strategies used by historical civic trailblazers to potential ways they can advocate for positive change in their own school or community.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

This lesson explores the history of civic activism in Colorado, highlighting how diverse individuals and groups have shaped the state's political and social landscape through grassroots organizing and advocacy. By examining the "Civic Trailblazers" featured in this set–ranging from the suffrage movement led by Elizabeth Piper Ensley and the Chicano movement championed by figures like

Corky Gonzales and Lupe Briseño, to the disability justice activism by the "Gang of 19" and the Indigenous advocacy of Ben Nighthorse Campbell–teachers can help students understand that civic engagement is a multigenerational, ongoing process. This primary source set emphasizes the strategies these trailblazers used to overcome systemic barriers, reminding students that "living in a revolution" means taking responsibility for one's community, building paths for future generations, and recognizing that those most impacted by an issue are often the most effective catalysts for creating lasting, equitable change.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student:

To prepare students for this lesson on Colorado's civic trailblazers, begin by activating their understanding of concepts such as fairness and community responsibility. Have a brief discussion asking students to share examples of times they have seen something unfair in their school or neighborhood - and what actions they took (or could have taken) to address it. Teachers might introduce concepts such as "rights" or "civic engagement," framing these as tools some people use to improve their communities. To focus on students' funds of knowledge, teachers might ask the question, "How does your family or community help each other when there is a problem?" By connecting historical figures like Elizabeth Piper Ensley or the Gang of 19 to the students' own lived experiences with making change, teachers can help approach the primary sources with a sense of agency and relevancy, setting the stage to see themselves as change makers.

Lesson Sources:

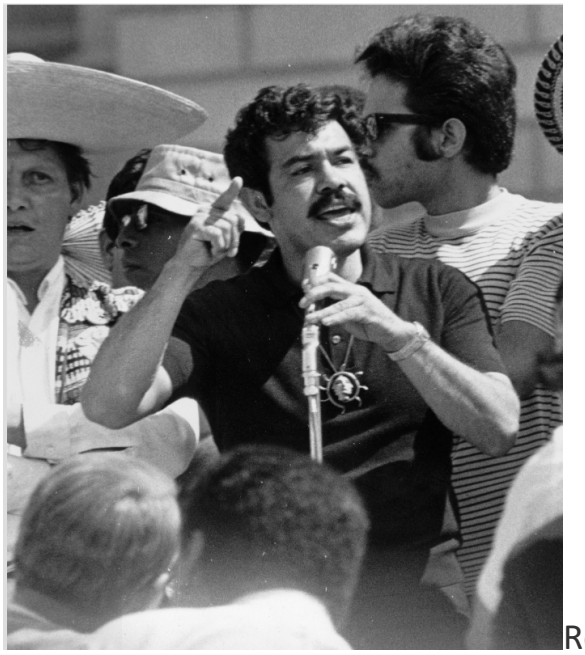
Source 1: Guadalupe (Lupe) Briseño



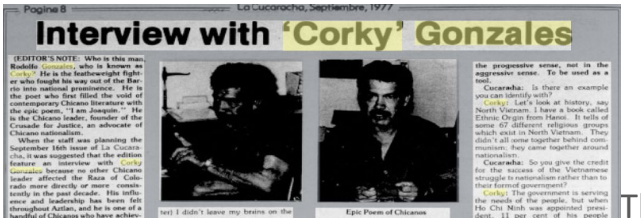
Guadalupe (Lupe) Briseño was a Mexican American woman and mother living in Brighton, Colorado in the 1960s and 1970s and

worked at a small floral plant. She experienced and witnessed mistreatment of the workers at the plant, so she organized a strike and protest to improve working conditions and pay. This oral history includes an interview and primary source images of Lupe and other Chicana activists protesting.
[Source of oral history interview: History Colorado]

Source 2: Corky Gonzales


Rodolpho "Corky" Gonzales, Mexican American activist and founder of the Crusade for Justice, addresses a crowd in Denver, Colorado. He holds a microphone and wears a pendant. A man in a large straw sombrero stands nearby.
Source: Gordon, John, *Corky Gonzales* (1960-1970). [Denver Public Library Special Collections, [Z-8827].]

Source 3: Interview with Corky Gonzales



This is an interview with Corky Gonzales, leader of the Chicano movement in Colorado. The following is an excerpt from that interview.

Interviewer: "*Many people in the Chicano Movement admit they have been influenced by you. Do you have a plan? Are you going someplace*?"
Corky: "*I have confidence that we have a way we are going. We do have a direction and we do have a philosophy for getting there. When we first get started in a movement we expect things to change immediately. WE have to look at it from an indigenous point of view; from the Indian point of view. We live based on generations and we change things based on generations. So it's a slower process than we believed at the start. It takes a process of planting the seed of change; the seed of revolution. I think our people should live with the feeling that they are in a revolution at all times. We try to chop the trees down so the people behind us can see the path*."
Interviewer: "*Then you are saying there will be a second generation of the movement*?"
Corky: "*There will be generations of the movement*."
Source: Colorado Historic Newspapers La Cucaracha, Volume II, Number 8, September 5, 1977

Source 4: Gang of 19 Protest



A group of protesters, now known as the Gang of 19, uses wheelchairs to stop traffic and raise awareness of the lack of accessibility regarding the Regional Transportation District (RTD) buses. A sign on the left reads: "Taxation without transportation!" with the handicapped symbol drawn on the poster. This black and white photograph originated in the Rocky Mountain News on July 6, 1978.

Source: Davis, Dick, 1922-2003, *Demonstrators who use wheelchairs protest bus accessibility* (July 6, 1978). Denver Public Library Digital Collections.

Source 5: Gang of 19 Protest



Attribution: Glen Martin/The Denver Post found at the Colorado Virtual Library.

Below is an excerpt from History Colorado's *Lost Highways* Podcast interviewing members of the Gang of 19.

On July 5th, 1978, nineteen disability rights activists blocked multiple buses at one of Denver's busiest intersections, causing a 24-hour traffic jam. Their actions would revolutionize the way we think about accessibility.

Noel: *"It was the morning of July 5th, 1978. Having lost the case that would've forced RTD to retrofit their public buses with wheelchair lifts, residents of Atlantis knew they'd have to force the issue."*

Bob Conrad: "*We said the only way to change this is to do a protest, and the easiest way to do that is pick a location that's central to Denver and where all the buses actually go by. And so we said, 'this is what is going to happen.'*"

Barry Rosenberg: "*So the ideal spot was Broadway and Colfax, epicenter of the city, right by the capital, etcetera. So a bus comes by on going east on Colfax.*"

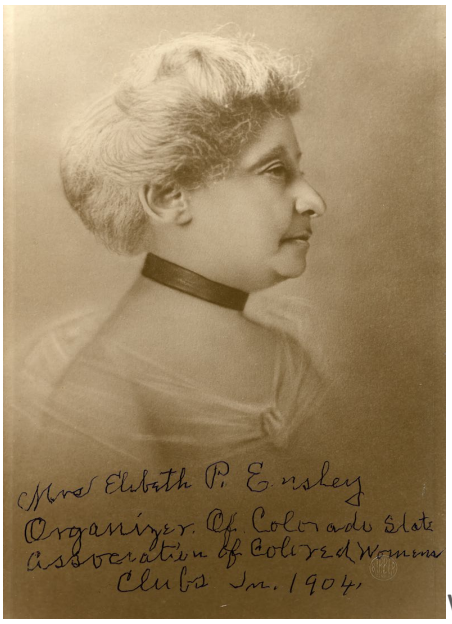
Bob Conrad: "*It didn't take many people to stop a bus. I mean, it's ridiculously easy to do. (laughs) You actually only need three people. So the bus driver pulls up. And if you time it right, it's going to be, you know, a red light. So you put one guy*

on the door of the bus. So the bus ain't gonna move. And then you get somebody in front of the bus. And then you get the person on the other side of the bus to stop the bus from turning."

Renate Conrad: "*Well, one of us would move out in front of the bus and then the bus would try to get around the first bus. And at that point, everybody ran out in front of the bus, not ran, but wheeled out in front of the bus. And we were lined up all across Colfax and Broadway.*"

Source: History Colorado: *Lost Highways*. Season 2, episode 1 *Ride or Die*.

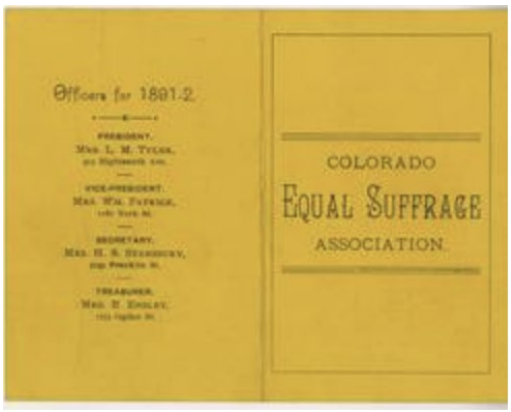
Source 6: Elizabeth Piper Ensley



When Colorado's voters passed HB 118 in November of 1893, it was the first time in U.S. history that a popular vote had passed women's suffrage into law. Elizabeth Piper Ensley was instrumental in Colorado's path towards that moment. Piper was an African American educator, political activist, and suffragist. This is a photo of Ensley from 1904.

Source: History Colorado: *The Colorado Magazine,* Feb. 18, 2020. Elizabeth Piper Ensley and the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment.
"Elizabeth Piper Ensley and the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment"

Source 7: Suffrage Pamphlet



This is a pamphlet from the Constitution of the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association in 1891. The treasurer is Mrs. E. Ensley. The second page of the pamphlet enumerates the Constitution of the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association.

Source: Ellis Meredith Collection, MSS.427, History Colorado.

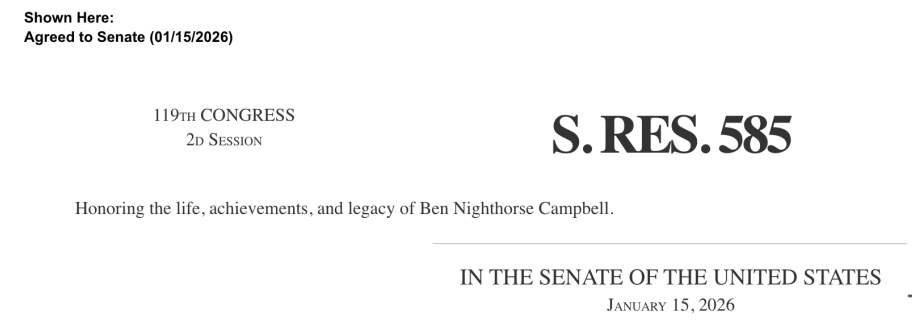
Source 8: U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell



Colorado U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell addressing the dedication of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site on June 1st, 2007. He is dressed in full regalia for the event. The website cited below includes several photographs of Senator Campbell as well as a memoriam honoring his legacy.

Source: Sand Creek Massacre Foundation

Source 9: Resolution for Sen. Campbell



Shown Here:
Agreed to Senate (01/15/2026)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 585

Honoring the life, achievements, and legacy of Ben Nighthorse Campbell.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES
JANUARY 15, 2026

This is a resolution sponsored by Senator Michael Bennett introduced on January 5, 2026, in the United States Senate titled, A resolution honoring the life, achievements, and legacy of Ben Nighthorse Campbell.

Source: Library of Congress Text - S.Res.585 - 119th Congress (2025-2026): A resolution honoring the life, achievements, and legacy of Ben Nighthorse Campbell (2026, January 15).

Lesson Materials:

1. Printed copies of the primary sources for each station
2. Print off 1 copy for each student of the Library of Congress "Observe, Reflect, and Question" protocol. Analyzing Primary Sources: Teachers' Guide and Analysis Tool

Lesson Instruction:

1. Create four stations with the associated primary sources.
    a. Chicano Rights: Corky Gonzales and Lupe Briseño
    b. Disability Rights: Gang of 19
    c. Women's Rights: Elizabeth Piper Ensley
    d. Indigenous People's Rights: Ben Nighthorse Campbell
2. Divide students into groups assigned to a station. At each station, groups will collaborate to analyze the sources using the Library of Congress "Observe, Reflect, and Question" protocol. Analyzing Primary Sources: Teachers' Guide and Analysis Tool

3. Have groups move to the next station to analyze the next topic and sources. Continue until all groups have visited each station.
4. After all groups have gone to each station, have small group or whole group discussions comparing the primary sources to address the lesson questions:
    a. Who are some of the civic trailblazers in Colorado that have helped to create positive change in our state?
    b. How did these individuals and groups of people work to create change?
    c. What have been some of the lasting impacts of the actions of these trailblazers?
    d. What do you think it means to be a trailblazer, and how can you be one at school or in our community?

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

Create visuals for the key vocabulary. For example, create a civic vocabulary wall with the word and a visual for all students to refer to. Some possible words: activism, suffrage, accessibility, representation, civic engagement, etc. Consider adding additional questions in the Observe, Reflect, Question protocol to prompt students' analysis of the primary sources.

If using a station rotation protocol, consider having groups leave their notes (sticky notes, graphic organizer, etc.) at each station so that new groups can add onto the thinking. Then, ask groups return to their original station and complete the Observe, Reflect, Question protocol using ideas from everyone in the class.

Create a graphic organizer that students can use as they evaluate each primary source and then compare the analysis across primary sources. This can provide a notetaking strategy as well as being used as a formative assessment.

Assessment:

Exit ticket: Students answer the lesson inquiry question: How have groups of people and individuals worked to create change in Colorado? Give at least two examples of groups/individuals and how they worked to create change. Include one way that Colorado has benefitted from this change.

To make connections between the topics and students, use the 3 Whys protocol from Harvard's Project Zero

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- SS.4.1.GLE 1.EO.a: Draw inferences about Colorado history from primary sources such as journals, diaries, maps, treaties, oral histories, etc.
- SS.4.4.GLE 1.EO.c: Discuss how various individuals and groups influence the way an issue affecting the state is viewed and resolved. Including but not limited to the contributions of African Americans, Latinos, Japanese Americans, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ, and religious groups.
- SS.4.4.GLE2.EO.e: Describe how a citizen might engage in local and state government to demonstrate their rights or initiate change.

2020 Colorado Reading, Writing, and Communicating Standards:

- RWC.4.GLE 1.EO.c: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Extension Activities:

1. Ask students to research another civic trailblazer in Colorado.
2. Invite a local community member or organization into the classroom to talk about how they are working to create change in the community.
3. Have students investigate a problem in their own community to come up with ways they could try to make change. Here is a resource to get started: A Guide to Community Action Projects for Elementary Students

Additional Resources:

- Colorado Experience PBS Film: The Gang of 19 - ADA Movement
- Colorado Experience PBS Film: Ben Nighthorse Campbell.
- Colorado Experience PBS Film: Suffrage.
- Colorado Experience PBS Film: Justicia y Libertad.
- Colorado Encyclopedia Article: Elizabeth Ensley
- Colorado Encyclopedia Article: Women's Suffrage Movement
- Colorado Encyclopedia Article: Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales