Episode 2: Voices in the Hall
Lesson Title: The Roots of Reform: What Made Colorado Fertile Ground for Activism

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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 who are most impacted by an issue to be involved in creating solutions?

Lesson Description:

This high school lesson uses *Voices in the Hall* to examine how Colorado's political environment fostered activism, legal reform, and community leadership. Anchored in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and Colorado's delayed recognition of American Indian voting rights, students compare this history with women's suffrage, Elizabeth Piper Ensley's civic leadership, the Gang of 19's disability rights activism, and the Gay Coalition of Denver's fight for LGBTQ rights. Through inquiry-based viewing, evidence tracking, and small-group analysis, students

explore the conditions that encouraged individuals and movements to demand greater civic participation.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

High School/ 60 minutes

Inquiry Question:

1. What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?

Supporting Questions:

1. What features of Colorado's constitution, laws, and political institutions created openings for activism, and what features created barriers?
2. How did Colorado's political culture and history shape which movements gained traction, and when?
3. How did activists work within, around, or against Colorado's political structures to expand civic participation?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Identify political, social, and legal conditions that fostered activism in Colorado.
2. Explain the difference between gaining legal rights and achieving meaningful civic participation.
3. Compare how individuals and movements used activism, community leadership, and legal reform to expand participation.
4. Construct and defend an evidence-based response to the question, *What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?*

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

Activism does not occur in a vacuum; it develops within a political environment that can create opportunities for participation while also reinforcing exclusion. Throughout its history, Colorado has done both. In 1893, the state extended full voting rights to women through a statewide vote, and in the early 1900s, it adopted initiative and referendum processes that gave citizens a more direct role

in shaping laws. These features helped establish political pathways through which residents could organize, build coalitions, and press for reform.

At the same time, Colorado's laws and institutions created significant barriers. Although the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted U.S. citizenship to American Indians, the state constitution's "under guardianship" language was used to deny many Native people voting rights for decades. Removing this barrier required sustained advocacy, legal pressure, and a constitutional amendment in 1970, demonstrating that federal recognition alone did not guarantee meaningful political participation.

Episode 2 of *Voices in the Hall* reveals this pattern across several movements. Women's suffrage advocates and civic leaders such as Elizabeth Piper Ensley used organizing and coalition building to expand political representation. The Gang of 19's 1978 protest against inaccessible Denver buses pressured local institutions to address disability rights, while Jerry Gerash and the Gay Coalition of Denver worked through local government, public demonstrations, media attention, and community organizing to advance LGBTQ rights. In each case, activists succeeded by identifying—or forcing open—points of access within Colorado's political system, including local ordinances, constitutional amendments, direct democracy, public opinion, and relationships with sympathetic officials. Teachers should guide students to examine both sides of this history: what features of Colorado's political environment fostered activism, and where did its laws, institutions, and political culture resist change?

Building Background Knowledge for the Student

1. Begin by asking students to respond individually to the following prompt: What tools do citizens have to influence the government, beyond just voting? Students create a list before sharing with a partner.
2. Next, display the statement: "A state's laws and political system can make it easier or harder for activism to succeed — not just the effort of the activists themselves." Students vote Agree, Disagree, or Unsure and explain their reasoning. Do not reveal the answer immediately.

3. Then introduce the lesson's inquiry question: What made Colorado's political environment foster activism? Explain that students will watch the episode not just to learn what activists did, but to investigate the political conditions: laws, institutions, and culture, that made their activism possible.

Sources:

Source 1: Indian Citizenship Act / Native American Voting Rights in Colorado

National Archives, Indian Citizenship Act (1924) — full text:

> "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that all non-citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States: Provided that the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property."

Source 2: Colorado Constitution, 1967, Article VII Section 1

> " Every citizen of the United States who shall have attained the age of 21 years, shall have resided in this state not less than one year next preceding the election at which he offers to vote, in the county, city, town, ward, or precinct such time as may be prescribed by law, and who shall have been duly registered as a voter if required by law, shall be qualified to vote at all elections; provided that the general assembly may by law extend citizens of the United States who have resided in this state less than one year, the right to vote for presidential and vice-presidential electors."

Note: The important issue is what the section does not say: it does not clearly protect otherwise-qualified citizens living on federally controlled land. This omission allowed residence on tribal lands to remain a disputed basis for denying voting access.

Source 3: Women's Suffrage (1893) Elizabeth Piper Ensley and the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment highlights Ensley's work as an educator, organizer, and Black suffragist. It describes her role in recruiting Black women, building political support and helping persuade male voters to approve women's suffrage.

Source 4: "The Road to the Vote": This article traces Colorado's women's suffrage movement from its early organizing in 1876 through the successful 1893 referendum. It describes the movement's setbacks, public education campaigns, political opposition, and use of Colorado's referendum process.

Source 5: This contemporary suffrage publication celebrated Colorado's 1893 referendum victory and discussed the geographic and political patterns of support. It is particularly valuable because students can analyze how suffragists framed their own success immediately after the election.

Source 6: This article describes how the Gang of 19 protested inaccessible public transportation by blocking Denver buses in July 1978. It also traces the development of Atlantis Community and ADAPT, organizations that advocated for independent living and equal access.

Source 7: This one-minute audio segment recounts how 19 disability rights activists blocked Denver buses in July 1978 to demand equal access to public transportation. It explains how the protest contributed to Denver becoming the first U.S. city with a fully accessible bus fleet and helped inspire a national movement that influenced the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Source 8: This biography describes how Jerry Gerash and the Gay Coalition of Denver challenged discriminatory policing and local laws in the 1970s. It highlights their use of lawsuits, public testimony, coalition building, and organized participation at Denver City Council, which helped lead to the repeal of several anti-gay ordinances.

Source 9: This article examines the Gay Coalition of Denver's campaign against discriminatory laws and police harassment targeting LGBTQ+ residents. It focuses on the coalition's 1973 appearance before the Denver City Council, when hundreds of community members demanded that city leaders repeal anti-gay ordinances.

Source 10: This oral history collection features Jerry Gerash describing his background, legal career, founding of the Gay Coalition of Denver, and leadership in Colorado's LGBTQ rights movement.

Lesson Materials Needed:

1. Case Study Comparison Organizer
2. Socratic Seminar Preparation Sheet

Lesson Instruction:

1. Introduce the Essential Question: What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?
2. Ask students to discuss what the phrase political environment might include, such as laws, government institutions, public attitudes, access to elected officials, voting systems, or opportunities for protest. Then, explain that students will examine how Colorado's political environment sometimes created opportunities for reform while also maintaining barriers to participation.
3. Build Background Knowledge by introducing the distinction between legal rights and meaningful civic participation.
4. Verbally share out the five examples below so students are clear about specific civic activism they are going to learn about.
    a. Colorado women gained voting rights in 1893.
    b. The Indian Citizenship Act granted U.S. citizenship to American Indians in 1924.
    c. Colorado removed a constitutional voting barrier affecting residents of federal lands in 1970.
    d. The Gang of 19 protested inaccessible public transportation in 1978.

e. The Gay Coalition of Denver challenged discriminatory laws and policing practices in the 1970s.

5. Ask students: Why might gaining a legal right not immediately result in equal case studies (American Indian Voting rights, Colorado women's suffrage and Elizabeth Piper Ensley, The Gang of 19 and Jerry Gerash and the Gay Coalition of Denver) and complete the Case Study Comparison Organizer.
6. Prepare for the Socratic Seminar by having students individually complete the Socratic Seminar Preparation Sheet. A completed Socratic Seminar Preparation Sheet will be the student's participant ticket for the Socratic Seminar that will follow this lesson. That will happen after time has been given for students to complete it.
7. View Episode 2 and Gather Evidence, as students watch, have the statements below posted/shared so that they can collect information on them.
    a. The barrier or injustice activists faced.
    b. The strategy activists used.
    c. The part of the political system they used or challenged.
    d. The change that resulted.
    e. Evidence showing how Colorado's political environment supported or resisted activism.
8. Analyze Case Studies by dividing students into small groups and assign each group two Case Studies to review.

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

1. Providing guided notes or partially completed organizers.
2. Previewing key vocabulary (citizenship, suffrage, disenfranchisement, activism, advocacy, representation, initiative, referendum, constitutional amendment).
3. Using sentence starters during discussion and writing.
4. Pairing students strategically for collaborative analysis.
5. Allowing students to demonstrate understanding through written, oral, visual, or multimedia responses.

Assessment:

Conduct the Socratic Seminar by arranging students in a circle or another format that allows them to speak directly to one another and begin with the central question: What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?

Encourage students to:

1. Support their ideas with evidence
2. Build on or challenge classmates' interpretations
3. Compare movements across different periods
4. Consider whether Colorado fostered activism because it welcomed reform or because its barriers created pressure for change
5. Revise their ideas as the discussion develops

Possible follow-up questions include:

1. Which parts of Colorado's political system gave activists access to power?
2. When did activists work within the system, and when did they disrupt it?
3. How did local action lead to broader legal or social change?
4. Did Colorado's political environment encourage activism, resist it, or both?
5. Which movement best demonstrates the relationship between activism and legal reform?

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- SS.HS.1.1.EO b. Gather and analyze historical information to address questions from a range of primary and secondary sources containing a variety of perspectives. For example: Perspectives of historically underrepresented groups.
- SS.HS.1.2.EO.a. Analyze continuity and change over the course of United States history. Including but not limited to: The expansion and limitations of rights, the balance between liberty and security, shifts in internationalist and isolationist policies, debates over the role of government, and the impacts of expansionist policies.

- SS.HS.1.2.EO.b. Investigate causes and effects of significant events throughout United States history. For example: World and national conflicts, urbanization and suburbanization, economic cycles, and both popular and counterculture movements.
- SS.HS.1.2.EO.c. Analyze the complexity of events throughout United States history.
- SS.HS.4.2.EO.g. Understand the structure of the American judicial system, the process of judicial appointments and key court decisions, in both Colorado and the United States, that affect the system of checks and balances and interactions of the local, state, tribal, and federal systems.

Extension Activities:

1. Research another political tool available to Colorado citizens (recall election, home rule, ballot measure) and explain how it has been used historically or recently.
2. Compare Colorado's political environment to another state's during the same time period. What made activism easier or harder there?
3. Interview a local elected official, tribal representative, or community advocate about how they navigate Colorado's political system to create change today.
4. Investigate a current ballot initiative or local ordinance debate in Colorado and evaluate what political tools activists on each side are using.

Additional Resources:

1. The Colorado Secretary of State's historical election archive provides digitized copies of official ballot analyses and statewide abstracts of votes. The searchable archive is useful for locating the measure associated with HCR 1008. Election Data: Colorado
2. This article examines how decades of legislative debate helped create the conditions for Colorado's successful 1893 women's suffrage referendum. It traces repeated proposals, setbacks, petitions, public testimony, and constitutional decisions from the territorial period through statehood.

3. “Wade Blank Helped Disability Rights Movement Define Its Values and Purpose,” 1993 This was written by disability-rights activist Laura Hershey shortly after Blank’s death. It is a primary source for how movement participants understood Blank’s leadership, organizing philosophy, and legacy.

Name_____ Date _____

Case Study Comparison Organizer- Episode 2 Lesson 3 HS

Essential Question: What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?

Case Study 1

1. Movement or individual: _____

2. What problem or barrier did activists face?

_____

_____

3. What political, legal, or social conditions shaped the movement?

_____

_____

4. What strategies did activists use?

☐ Public protest
☐ Legal action
☐ Testimony or lobbying
☐ Coalition building
☐ Media or public awareness
☐ Ballot initiative or referendum
☐ Other: _____

5. What part of Colorado's political system did activists use or challenge?

_____

_____

6. What changed as a result?

_____

_____

7. Evidence from the film or source:

_____

_____

Case Study 2

1. Movement or individual: _____

2. What problem or barrier did activists face?

3. What political, legal, or social conditions shaped the movement?

4. What strategies did activists use?

☐ Public protest
☐ Legal action
☐ Testimony or lobbying
☐ Coalition building
☐ Media or public awareness
☐ Ballot initiative or referendum
☐ Other: _____

5. What part of Colorado's political system did activists use or challenge?

6. What changed as a result?

7. Evidence from the film or source:

Compare the Cases

1. What similarities do you notice?

2.What important differences do you notice?

3.What do these cases suggest about why Colorado fostered activism?

Name_____ Date _____

Socratic Seminar Preparation Sheet

Seminar Question: What made Colorado's political environment foster activism?

Develop Your Initial Claim

Complete the statement:

Colorado's political environment fostered activism because _____

Prepare Your Evidence

Use evidence from at least two examples from the lesson.

Example 1: _____

Specific evidence:

How this evidence supports my claim:

Example 2: _____

Specific evidence:

How this evidence supports my claim:

Consider Complexity

What features of Colorado's political environment opened opportunities for activism?

What laws, institutions, or attitudes resisted change?

How did activists overcome or work around those barriers?

Questions and Connections

A question I can ask:

A connection I can make between two movements:

A point I may challenge or complicate:

Discussion Norms

During the seminar:

- Refer to specific evidence from the film and sources.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Respond to classmates' ideas, not just the teacher.
- Build on, question, or respectfully challenge previous comments.
- Explain your reasoning rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing.
- Make space for others to participate.
- Be willing to revise your thinking when presented with new evidence.

Helpful Discussion Stems

- "One example that supports this idea is…"

- “I would like to build on that point by…”
- “Another way to interpret this evidence is…”
- “How does that example connect to…?”
- “I agree with part of that argument, but…”
- “This evidence suggests that…”
- “My thinking changed because…”