



Game Changers



NBA and WNBA Game Changers: Celebrating Black History Classroom Activity

Overview

In honor of Black History Month, students will explore what it means to use their voices to create positive changes for themselves and their communities all year long. First, students will brainstorm ways people create positive changes and what those have in common. Next, students will analyze primary and secondary sources that highlight important themes for civic action. Finally, students will explore their own identities and revisit ways they can plan, act, and reflect on taking action to better their communities.

Audience:

- Grades 3-8

Compelling Question:

- How can I use my voice to take positive action?

Objectives:

- Brainstorm ways you can use your voice or talents to make a difference in your community.
- Analyze examples of changemakers from the past and present and discuss their impact.
- Reflect on your own identity and how it might impact how and why you use your voice for good.

Materials:

- Video: NBA and WNBA Game Changers: Celebrating Black History
- Handout 1: Changemakers (Tommie Smith and John Carlos)
- Handout 2: Identity Box
- Handout 3: Plan Act Reflect

Teacher Notes:

- This activity follows an Ask, Analyze, Apply, and Act format that encourages a student-centered inquiry approach.
- There are two “Changemakers” handouts. The first is designed for older students, and the second is designed for younger students.
- As students work through the activities in the lesson, remind them that they come to class with skills, talents, and experiences they can use to better their communities and support others.

Background Information:





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The National Basketball Association (NBA), Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and Discovery Education (DE) have partnered together on a five-part video series called "NBA and WNBA Game Changers". This video series will focus on NBA and WNBA players, former players, and coaches who have used their voices to create positive changes for themselves and others. Videos will align with:

- Black History Month
- Women's History Month
- Financial Literacy Month
- Mental Health Awareness Month
- Pride Month

The focus of this activity is Black History Month and highlights the importance of using your voice for a greater good. Black History Month, celebrated in February each year, is meant to honor, celebrate, and reflect on the achievements of African Americans in the United States. Black History Month began as a week-long celebration in 1926. Dr. Carter G. Woodson originally chose a week during the month of February to honor two Americans who were instrumental in shaping black history, Frederick Douglas and Abraham Lincoln.

Over the years the celebration continued to grow well past a week and, during the 1960s, with the swell of civil rights protests, many college campuses and groups began featuring celebrations throughout the month. President Gerald Ford officially expanded the celebration to Black History Month in 1975, famously reminding Americans to "Seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history." Even from the beginning, Dr. Woodson knew that black history and the celebration of achievements should be a focus all year long.

References:

[Origins of Black History Month – ASALH – The Founders of Black History Month](#)
[#Library of Congress - African American History Month! \(loc.gov\)](#)

Procedure



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Ask:

- After the class finishes watching the video, invite students to consider the following question “How do people create positive change?”. To help students brainstorm ideas, write the question on the board and allow students a few minutes to discuss.
- Invite students to share their ideas. Keep track of their ideas on the board or a place where all students can see them. Students might share examples like picking up trash, attending a protest, donating money or their time, etc.
- Allow students a few moments to review the list and pose a follow-up question that helps dig deeper into their ideas like, “What do these actions have in common?”. Explain that the actions listed all require someone to see a problem or issue and decide to act on it.
- Remind students of Etan Thomas’ story and his decision to act to create awareness for an issue and inspire others. As students recall Etan’s story, they too might want to share a way in which they have taken action to better their communities or support someone. Explain that these actions can be big, complex efforts or small, daily interactions, and no matter the scope, what matters is using their voices and deciding to act when they feel the need.

Analyze:

- Next, students will analyze an example of changemakers who used their voices and platforms to make a difference.
- Provide each student with the Changemakers handout at the end of this activity. Explain that the class will use the information to learn more about other changemakers and reflect on how their stories can inspire them to use their voices for good.
 - During this exercise, students learn more about the famous image of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics. While students may be familiar with the image, the story captures the importance of how someone can use their voice and platform to take action with something as small as a gesture or symbol.
- After students finish with the reading, encourage students to collaborate in small groups by posing the following questions
 - What did you learn that surprised you?
 - How did the athletes use their voices and symbolism to call attention to an urgent issue?
 - How might their actions connect with events you hear about today when athletes or celebrities use their platforms to address issues in society? What examples can you think of?

Apply:

- Students will now apply what they have learned by reflecting on their own identities as changemakers and the ways in which they have used their voices.
- Either distribute the Identity Box handout to each student or ask students to draw the graphic organizer in their notebooks. Explain that an important step in thinking about how they can use their voices to support others is to reflect on what makes them unique. These things might be interests, talents, passions, or lived experiences. For example, a student might share that they love to write. This student might consider how their passion for writing could be used to uplift others or call attention to an important issue.



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- After reading the directions on the handout, provide students with a few minutes to fill in their graphic organizers. As students work on the chart, encourage them to think about all the great things that make them who they are.
- When finished with the chart, encourage students to reflect on the complexity of identity. If needed, use the following questions to help guide student thinking.
 - How did this exercise help you think about the many parts of someone's identity?
 - How might reflecting on who you are help you think about what or who is important to you, and ways you might use your voice?

Act:

- To help put learning into action, share with students that they are going to complete a final exercise that asks them to plan a way they can use their voices for good or to take meaningful action.
 - As you share this information, begin passing out a copy of the Reflect, Plan, Act handout to each student and remind them that they can revisit their identity box for inspiration. It may also be important to remind students that no action is too small and that they should consider how acts of service help unite individuals and communities.
- Ask students to read through the document to note any questions they may have. After students have had a few moments to read through the directions, remind the class that no act of service is too small and that they should feel empowered and supported to brainstorm an act of service or way to create awareness for something that matters to them.
- Provide the class with 15–20 minutes to complete the planning steps. Time may be adjusted based on the needs of the class.
 - As students are working, some students may not connect that they have interests, skills, or talents that can help someone else. It might be useful to share a few ideas that do not take money or significant amounts of time.
- As the activity ends, affirm for students that each person has the power to act on behalf of what is just and share with students the Martin Luther King, Jr. quote, “the time is always right to do what is right.”.



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Handout 1: Changemakers (Tommie Smith and John Carlos)

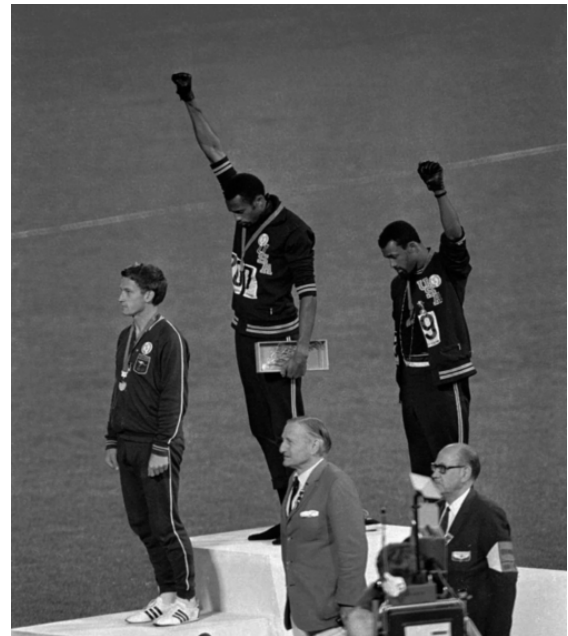
Directions:

Use the excerpt and image below to read about how two individuals chose to use their voices to call attention to injustice.

Tommie Smith won gold in the 200-meter sprint at the 1968 Olympic Summer Games in Mexico City, but he and John Carlos, who won bronze in the event, are best known for their gesture of protest during the medal ceremony.

As the Star-Spangled Banner played and two American flags were raised, Smith and Carlos stood on the victory platform with their black-gloved fists lifted in the air and their heads bowed down.

Both Smith and Carlos were members of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) at San Jose State University. Before leaving for the 1968 Olympics, both Smith and Carlos planned their protest. During the medal ceremony, the two sprinters raised a black-gloved fist as a black power salute and wore only black socks to symbolize poverty in black America.



The action was controversial during the tumultuous 1960s. However, their actions brought attention to the systematic issues that people of color faced in the United States and around the world. They were immediately removed from the Olympic village and criticized by many in society and the media for their actions during an Olympic event. Despite the initial backlash, their actions stand as a testament to the power of protest and acting on your conscious.

References:

[Tommie Smith and John Carlos | Smithsonian Institution \(si.edu\)](https://www.si.edu/history/olympics/1968/medal-ceremony)

[Tommie Smith and John Carlos | Arthur Ashe Legacy \(ucla.edu\)](https://www.arthurashelegacy.com/tommie-smith-and-john-carlos)



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Handout 2: Identity Boxes

Directions:

Write your name in the box and use the lines to write important parts of what makes you, you! There are lots of things that make you unique. Think about your personality, interests, culture, language, background, and goals.

A central rounded rectangle with a blue border contains the text "Name: _____". Eight blue lines radiate from the corners and midpoints of the rectangle, extending outwards to provide space for writing.





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Handout 3: Reflect Plan Act

Step 1: Using your Voice

It might be helpful to begin by considering the reflection questions below:

- What special interests, skills, or talents do you have that could be used to support others?
- Can you identify a specific need in your family, school, or community that you could address?

Next, brainstorm three options that sound achievable for you or a small group. You may also consider adding new actions that were not considered earlier.

Option 1: _____ Why this option?

Option 2: _____ Why this option?

Option 3: _____ Why this option?

Step 2: Planning

Now, consider what you might need to get started.

Are there supplies or resources that you need to make your act of service happen?

Should anyone else be involved?

Do you need to contact anyone to learn more information or to lend support?

When is it realistic for your act of service to take place?

