

ACTIVITY

Supporting Question 1: Defining Freedom

Overview

About This Activity

Students explore Supporting Question 1 through a series of activities designed to help them think about the meaning of freedom in the United States. They first reflect on when they know that they and others have freedom. Next, they examine Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* painting series and contemporary updates to those paintings from Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur. They conclude by creating their own visual representation of freedom for the formative task.

Supporting Question	What can freedom mean in the United States?
Formative Task	Students share their own definitions of freedom by creating a "Freedom of . . ." or a "Freedom from . . ." sign.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout: What Can Freedom Mean? • Images: <i>Four Freedoms</i> by Norman Rockwell • Images: <i>For Freedoms: Four Freedoms, 2018</i>, by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur • Handout: "Freedom from . . ." • Handout: "Freedom of . . ." <p>Find these materials in this Google Folder.</p>

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

Before teaching this lesson, please review the following information to help guide your preparation process.

Teaching the *Four Freedoms* images

In the activities for this supporting question, students will be examining two sources: a series of images from Norman Rockwell entitled *Four Freedoms* (1943) and a contemporary update to the images from the artists Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur. Students will likely notice that Rockwell's images provide an exclusionary view of the typical American family as white and middle class, while Willis Thomas and Shur's version offers a more diverse portrait of the US, and touches

on themes of race, gender, sexuality, and class. For this reason, we recommend that you preview all materials in advance of teaching them, and encourage you to make choices about how to share the images with students that make sense in the context of your classroom. You also might want to contract with students at the beginning of class.

Procedure

Activity 1: What Does Freedom Mean to You?

Begin class by reminding students that this inquiry will invite them to think about how those of us living in the United States can make real the ideals of democracy and freedom. Tell students that in order to explore the compelling question, they will first need to define what freedom and democracy mean in their own lives.

Teaching Note: If using this inquiry as a throughline for your US history class, you may also explain that the compelling question will be the lens through which you will be examining the content of this course.

Either by projecting on the board or by writing on big paper, model the **What Can Freedom Mean?** handout. Explain that this handout will have students think about how different people in their lives may experience freedom. In a whole-class discussion, model the next activity by having one or two students give examples of when they know that they have freedom and when they don't have freedom. If students answer, "Freedom is when I can or can't do what I want," ask them for a specific example of what they mean. After modeling the activity, have the class break into small groups to continue to work on the handout. If time permits, have students share their responses with the class.

Activity 2: Examine Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* Painting Series

Next, share the **Norman Rockwell series *Four Freedoms***. Explain to students that the painting series was based on a speech that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave in 1941 articulating four basic human freedoms for a post-war world: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

Create a [Gallery Walk](#) of the four paintings and have students circulate around the room with their notebooks or a piece of paper to view all four. Then ask them to select one painting they would like to analyze in more detail. Once students have selected which painting they would like to examine, have them stand in front of it and complete a [See, Think, Wonder](#) activity. Pose the following three questions in order, pausing after each question to give students time to reflect.

- What do you see? What details stand out? (At this stage, elicit observations, not

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interpretations.)

- What do you think is going on? What makes you say that?
- What does this make you wonder? What broader questions does this image raise for you?

Ask students to return to their seats and share their observations with a partner in a [Think, Pair, Share](#).

Before debriefing the paintings in a class discussion, define for students the difference between “freedom of” and “freedom from,” both of which appear in these paintings (e.g., “freedom from want” and “freedom of speech”). “Freedom of” is an example of what some scholars have called *positive freedom*, which means “the capacity to.” “Freedom from” is an example of what some scholars have called *negative freedom*, which means “freedom from external limits or restrictions.”

Then discuss the following questions as a class:

- What new ideas or questions about freedom do you have after viewing these paintings?
- Do you believe it is important to protect both types of freedom—“freedom of” and “freedom from”? Why or why not?
- Do you think the four freedoms outlined in the paintings are a reality for most Americans today? Why or why not?

Activity 3: Explore a Contemporary Update to Rockwell's *Four Freedoms*

Explain to students that they will now be examining a modern update to Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* created by the artists Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur. Arrange the class in table groups of three or four students. Give each table group a folder of one of the following sets of images from ***For Freedoms: Four Freedoms, 2018, by Hank Willis Thomas and Emily Shur***:

- Freedom of Speech
- Freedom of Worship
- Freedom from Want
- Freedom from Fear

Ask groups to view all the images and record observations in their notebooks about how the artists chose to update the Rockwell paintings for a modern audience. Then have table groups complete a [Connect, Extend, Challenge](#) reflection responding to the images they examined. They should discuss and write down how the images do the following:

- 1) Connect to what they already know about the meaning of freedom
- 2) Extend their understanding of the meaning of freedom
- 3) Challenge their understanding of the meaning of freedom

Ask volunteers to share a summary of their group discussions with the class.

Formative Task

Create “Freedom of . . .” or “Freedom from . . .” Signs

To reflect on the supporting question (“What can freedom mean in the United States?”), ask students to share their own definitions of freedom. Pass out copies of the handouts “**Freedom of . . .**” and “**Freedom from . . .**” to all students. Then explain that they will be sharing their own definitions of freedom by filling out **one** or more of the handouts. Explain that students should complete the handout by finishing the sentence (e.g., “Freedom from a nine-to-five job” or “Freedom of the mind”) and drawing some visual symbol that represents the freedom. Encourage students to think about the freedoms that matter most to them, their families, and their communities.

You may want to create a display with the completed handouts in your classroom or in some other part of the school.