



Women, Power and Politics Shirley Chisholm Curriculum

- I. **Guiding Parameters:** Women, Leadership and Democracy in the United States

- II. **Objectives:** Students will accomplish the following:
 - a. Learn about the historic role women have played in U.S. politics
 - b. Analyze socio-cultural implications of a woman running for the highest office in the country both in the 1970s as well as today
 - c. Evaluate the motivations behind Chisholm’s campaign and the challenges she faced
 - d. Assess the political and social impact of Chisholm’s campaign at the time and its legacy
 - e. Compare and contrast Chisholm’s campaign in the 1970s to Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin’s campaigns today (highlighting political strategies, gender relations and race relations)
 - f. Understand the basic principles of the American democratic system
 - g. Learn how to participate in the democratic system

- III. **Learning Skills:** Historical thinking, compare and contrast, analytical thinking, research and assessment, writing, reading comprehension, public speaking and presentation

- IV. **Main Resource:** Read “[The Ticket That Might Have Been](#)”

- V. **Related Reading:** [Political Firsts](#), [Victoria Woodhull](#), [The Year of the Woman](#), [Blogging about Sarah Palin](#), [Films on Democracy](#), [Then and Now: Faces of Suffrage](#), [Emancipated Woman—Build up Socialism!](#) [Madame Mao](#), [Cartoon As a Political Manifesto](#), [Malaysia’s Star Everywoman](#), [Vote Art for Change](#), [Political Dreams for Women](#), [Dictating Democracy](#), [The Solidarity Quilt](#)

- VI. **Three Classroom Activities:**

Gender and Politics: If Obama Were a Woman, Would He Have Been President?

- a. **Consider:** After reading [The Ticket That Might Have Been](#), consider Shirley Chisholm’s motivations to run a campaign that had no chance of winning.

- b. **Analyze:** Identity and Politics (full class activity)



- i. Distribute Chisholm's quotes to the class. You can find them in the **Reference** section at the end of this packet. Have students take turns reading each one out loud.
 - ii. As the quotes are being read, students should identify and write down some common themes and keywords (for example, "first," "woman," "equality," "free," "black," "political").
 - iii. Students should report their findings and the teacher should write them on the board as a visual reference and kick-off for the following discussion questions.
- c. Discuss: Identity and Politics continued
- i. Why did Chisholm run a campaign knowing that her efforts would not result in a presidential win?
 - ii. How did Chisholm represent herself? How did people perceive her?
 - iii. How did the media represent Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin differently? How did that influence your perception of them?
 - iv. What if Barack Obama were female and running against Hillary Clinton? Who would have faced more obstacles?
 - v. Would President Obama have won in 2008 if he were an African American woman? Why or why not?
- d. Reflect: Quick write-up
- i. Read [Blogging about Sarah Palin](#), [Fashion Is Political](#), [The Power Suit](#), [10 Questions with Erica Falk](#).
 - ii. Quick-write: Has the perception of female politicians and leaders changed since Chisholm's campaign in 1972? Compare and contrast with today's perception of female leaders, especially considering Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin's recent campaigns?

Setting the Stage: What Does Democracy Mean?

- a. Think: Read [The Ticket That Might Have Been](#). How is voting presented in the story? In what context is it mentioned? Ask a friend or a family member of voting age what the right to vote means to them. Did they vote in the last election? Why or why not? Do they typically vote? Why or why not?
- b. Brainstorm: Think about the meaning of political representation, citizenship and voting and their importance within a democratic system of governance.



- i. On the board, draw a picture of three **pillars** supporting a **platform**, which is “Democracy.”
 - ii. Each pillar represents citizenship, political representation and voting.
 - iii. Democratic shout-out: For 30 seconds, have all students shout out key words that they think define democracy.
 1. Write those keywords on top of the platform.
 - iv. Make a list for each pillar. Ask the following guiding questions to fill in keyword definitions for each pillar:
 1. What does citizenship mean? What rights do you have as a citizen?
 2. What are the duties of a citizen?
 3. Why is voting important?
 4. What does voting mean to you?
 5. Who represents your voice in local, state and federal government?
 6. How do the notions of citizenship and voting influence the people elected to represent you?
- c. Discuss: As a class, read out loud some personal testimonies from [The Ticket That Might Have Been](#) and review the quotes from Shirley Chisholm that are attached at the end of this packet.
- i. What impact (according to the personal testimonies) did Chisholm’s candidacy have on her constituents?
 - ii. What qualities did Chisholm display throughout her campaign?
 - iii. What kind of impact did her campaign approach have on the way people viewed her? Did her personal style benefit her cause or take away from it?
- d. Reflect: Would you have voted for Shirley Chisholm?
- i. Have each student go around the class and give one reason why they would or would not have voted for Shirley Chisholm based on class discussion and readings.
- e. Discuss: Did gender influence your decision? Why or why not?

Politics and Leadership: Empowerment Begins at Home

- a. Reflect: Review [The Ticket That Might Have Been](#) and read [Follow the Leader](#). Each person identifies someone at home or in their community that they view as a leader. Write a paragraph describing at least three things that make them a leader.



- b. Discuss: (in small groups)
 - i. Share your leader(s) with the group.
 - ii. Discuss the following two questions:
 - 1. What makes a leader? Who are some other leaders in your community? (Do you think that your elected officials, police officers, teachers and parents are leaders?)
 - 2. How are you a leader?
- c. Watch: Screen in class the film *A Celebration of Women's History*
- d. Brainstorm: As a class, make two columns on the board ("Platform" and "Strategy").
 - i. What defines a platform? What defines a strategy?
 - ii. What was Chisholm's campaign platform? What issues did she bring up?
 - iii. How did she reach out to inform people of those issues? What was her plan?
- e. Interview: Have students pick a partner and answer the question: If you were running for office, what issue would you advocate for and why?
- f. Share: Have students come together as a class and report back what they discussed with their partner. How are the students' issues similar or dissimilar to those of Shirley Chisholm's campaign?
- g. Create: Design a campaign. The following are instructions for students:
 - i. Choose an elected office. Create a campaign platform with three main issues. Pick one to three campaign strategies. Create an 8–10 minute presentation to explain your position and persuade your constituents. Be creative. Think of your issues and whom they affect. Base your strategies on a specific audience you want to persuade (e.g., parents, teens, women, churchgoers, etc.).
 - 1. Sample presentation ideas:
 - a. Recipe (this in an example)
 - i. Ingredients: personal qualifications and platform issues of a candidate
 - ii. Mix it all up, leave in oven for duration of office or proposed timeline of policy



- iii. Voilà: you get paid sick days, increased student financial aid, carbon reduction, etc.
 - b. Skit (monologue, TV interview, panel discussion and performance): [Vote Art for Change](#)
 - c. Campaign poster: [Emancipated Woman—Build Up Socialism!](#), [Madame Mao](#), [Picturing Power](#)
 - d. Video commercial
 - e. Speech
 - f. Song: [Malaysia's Star Everywoman](#)
 - g. Poem: [Woman President's Manifesto](#)
 - h. Story
 - i. Debate between two candidates
 - j. Art piece: [Zapatista Women Living in Color](#), [Body As Art](#)
 - k. Cartoon: [Cartoon as a Political Manifesto](#)
 - l. Picture/image/slideshow
 - m. Blog
 - n. Opinion editorial
2. Additional resources: [Toolkit](#), [Democracy](#) exhibition theme, [How to Start a Women's Party](#)
- h. **Debrief:** Post-presentation discussion
 - i. What are some of the challenges you would have faced as a candidate in terms of your own ethnicity, religion, culture and gender?
 - ii. How are your challenges similar and/or dissimilar to those of Shirley Chisholm's campaign?
 - iii. How did you use Shirley Chisholm's campaign as a model in designing your own campaign?
 - iv. Are the issues Chisholm championed still relevant today?

VII. **References: Shirley Chisholm's Quotes**

"I was the first American citizen to be elected to Congress in spite of the double drawbacks of being female and having skin darkened by melanin. When you put it that way, it sounds like a foolish reason for fame. In a just and free society it would be foolish. That I am a national figure because I was the first person in 192 years to be at once a congressman, black and a woman proves, I think, that our society is not yet either just or free."



“I want history to remember me not just as the first black woman to be elected to Congress, not as the first black woman to have made a bid for the presidency of the United States, but as a black woman who lived in the 20th century and dared to be herself.”

“Of my two ‘handicaps’ being female put more obstacles in my path than being black.”

“I’ve always met more discrimination being a woman than being black.”

“My God, what do we want? What does any human being want? Take away an accident of pigmentation of a thin layer of our outer skin and there is no difference between me and anyone else. All we want is for that trivial difference to make no difference.”

“Racism is so universal in this country, so widespread and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it is so normal.”

“We Americans have a chance to become someday a nation in which all racial stocks and classes can exist in their own selfhoods, but meet on a basis of respect and equality and live together, socially, economically, and politically.”

“In the end, anti-black, anti-female and all forms of discrimination are equivalent to the same thing—anti-humanism.”

“My greatest political asset, which professional politicians fear, is my mouth, out of which come all kinds of things one shouldn’t always discuss for reasons of political expediency.”

“The United States was said not to be ready to elect a Catholic to the Presidency when Al Smith ran in the 1920’s. But Smith’s nomination may have helped pave the way for the successful campaign John F. Kennedy waged in 1960. Who can tell? What I hope most is that now there will be others who will feel themselves as capable of running for high political office as any wealthy, good-looking white male.”

“At present, our country needs women’s idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.”

“I am, was, and always will be a catalyst for change.”

“There is little place in the political scheme of things for an independent, creative personality, for a fighter. Anyone who takes that role must pay a price.”



“One distressing thing is the way men react to women who assert their equality: their ultimate weapon is to call them unfeminine. They think she is anti-male; they even whisper that she's probably a lesbian.”

“... rhetoric never won a revolution yet.”

“Prejudice against blacks is becoming unacceptable although it will take years to eliminate it. But it is doomed because, slowly, white America is beginning to admit that it exists. Prejudice against women is still acceptable. There is very little understanding yet of the immorality involved in double pay scales and the classification of most of the better jobs as ‘for men only.’”

“Tremendous amounts of talent are being lost to our society just because that talent wears a skirt.”

“Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.”
(Quote also attributed to Marian Wright Edelman.)

“I am not anti-white because I understand that white people, like black ones, are victims of a racist society. They are products of their time and place.”