

Stacey L. Kirby Toolkit: Civic Duty

Abstract

This toolkit offers resources and activities for students studying voting inequality and obstacles in the U.S. The activities and discussion questions integrate the work of artist Stacey Kirby and her performance piece titled, "The Power of the Ballot," and the exhibit titled, "Rights and Wrongs." Students will have the chance to interact directly with archived materials from these works.

Grade Levels

Grades 9-12

Subjects/Concepts

Civic Duty, Voting, Civics, Government, Inequality, Racism, Sexism

Learning Objectives

- Understand the history of voting rights and civil rights.
- Identify voting barriers that affect U.S. residents, current and historical.

Who is Stacey Kirby?

"Kirby is a queer, white-bodied, self-appointed civil servant from North Carolina who creates socially-engaged interactive performance art. Her performative interactions set within site-specific installations utilize bureaucratic forms, postures and language in vintage office environments to engage participants and community performers in questions around civil authority. Through humor and satire, Kirby reinvents the bureaucratic process in alternative, private and public spaces to elicit diverse dialogue about identity, community and human rights in the United States. Developed over the past 20 years, in more than 200 performances, with over 300 community performers and 10,000 participants, Kirby's work evolves with the physical and historical setting, political climate and participants' involvement at each location." ([Stacy L. Kirby](#))

Stacey's Work: "The Power of the Ballot"

"Stacey L. Kirby's *The Power of the Ballot*, explores the ultimate form of participation in our government - voting. Kirby advocates for political awareness and participation through voting in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's gutting of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 (2012) and subsequent nation-wide state legislation limiting citizens' rights.

The Power of the Ballot establishes a site-specific voting precinct constructed of customized ballot boxes and a woven green privacy curtain, reminiscent of large mechanical lever voting machines. Kirby's original ballot design and installation reference her own childhood memories

and extensive archival research into the evolution of the voting process.

At the precinct, the Chief Precinct Officer and the Precinct Officer of the Interior assist the voters in casting their ballots. Voters answer the question: What obstacles do you overcome to vote? All ballots cast in ‘the election’ are tallied by community volunteers and a 'winning obstacle' is announced after the precinct closes at the end of the event or exhibition.” ([Stacey L. Kirby](#))

Terms to Know

Civic Duty: The principle that citizens owe some allegiance to their government and that government in turn protects its citizens. Some examples of civic duties are obeying the law, serving on a jury, paying taxes and voting. ([U.S. Legal](#))

Voter Suppression: The effort or activity designed to prevent people from voting by making voting impossible, dangerous or just very difficult. ([Learning for Justice](#))

Privilege: Special right/advantage available to only some.

Discrimination: Unjust or prejudice treatment.

Racism: Discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

Sexism: Discrimination based on sex or gender.

Inequality: Lack of equality, in this case social or economic disparity.

Obstacle: Something that hinders progress.

Activity resources

- History of Southern Voting Barriers: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/voting_literacy.html
- Current Voting Barriers: <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/fln33-soc-voterfraud/wgbh-frontline-why-voter-id-laws-arent-really-about-fraud/>
- So You Think You Can Vote? (Video): <https://youtu.be/xbb3BWnWB60>
- Stacey Kirby “Power of the Ballot” Video: <https://vimeo.com/139866481>
- “Power of the Ballot” Blank Form: <https://unceducationaltoolkit.github.io/pdfs/kirbyartisttalk.pdf> (Page 4)
- “Power of the Ballot” Archived Forms: <http://cargocollective.com/staceykirby/The-Power-of-the-Ballot>

Class Activity

1. Review “Terms to Know” as a class.
2. Review the resources for current and historical voting barriers. Watch the “So You Think You Can Vote?” Video. Discuss how race, class, gender, etc. affect voting ability.
3. Introduce Stacey Kirby and her work, “Power of the Ballot” (watch video). Review archived ballots from the piece to see current examples of obstacles to voting.

4. Give students blank “Power of the Ballot” forms. Have them consider their identity (race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, etc.) and what obstacles might arise for them personally when voting.
5. Compare and discuss their answers. Use the discussion questions below to guide the conversation.

Discussion Questions

1. What voting obstacles do you see yourself encountering when you can vote? Do you know anyone of voting age who has encountered obstacles shown in the videos/resources?
2. Compare with a classmate and look at the archived forms from Stacey Kirby. How do their obstacles differ from yours? What role does race, gender, class, etc. play in these differences?
3. How have current voting obstacles evolved/changed over the years?
4. If you could imagine no obstacles, consider why this might be.
5. What roles have these obstacles played in U.S. elections and laws? Can you think of ways that the U.S. can try to eliminate potential obstacles so that voting is accessible to all?

Learn More: Voting Inequality & Obstacles

Voter suppression lessons compiled by Learning for Justice, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/future-voters-project/educate-students/lessons-voter-suppression>

TEDEd video titled, “The fight for the right to vote in the United States” by Nicki Beaman Griffin: <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-fight-for-the-right-to-vote-in-the-united-states-nicki-beaman-griffin>