

Activity 3

Democracy Around the World
(90-120 minutes + assignments)



“Africa is going through a transition; Liberia is going through a transition. There will be charges and counter-charges. That’s what an environment of democracy and freedom does—it enables people to speak out.”

—President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf



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Objectives: Students will

- read and analyze opinion-editorial writing
- analyze and critically view film as text
- research democratic systems in a specific country and develop a presentation for a roundtable format
- learn about the U.S. government's position as a model for democracy for countries around the world

Skills: Stating and supporting opinions in class discussions and in writing, critical reading and viewing, research, note taking and oral presentation

Materials: Board or overhead projector, chart paper, **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Video Module, IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Discussion Guide, Teacher Handout C** and art supplies

Democracy exists in different forms in many countries around the world. Some countries are in the process of transitioning to or developing democracy; in other countries, democracy is more established. Still others may have a different system, yet still be influenced by democracy because it has been strongly promoted around the world by the United States and other Western countries. In this lesson, students examine what democracy looks like and how it plays out in countries with different political, ideological and cultural histories and backgrounds.

Procedures

1. Read "Background Information About Liberia and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf" from the IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Discussion Guide. Discuss how the events described (U.N. peacekeeping presence, debt forgiveness by the United States) point toward Liberia's future.

2. Present these two quotes:

Africa is going through a transition; Liberia is going through a transition. There will be charges and counter-charges, that's what an environment of democracy and freedom does, it enables people to speak out. But, of course, this dissent could be dangerous.

-Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia

Liberia has progressed now, to have serious political debates, but trust me, Africa... 100% democracy... is no way working. Especially right after the war. Because the people will say that's my right to sell in your living room. That's my right to scratch your car. I mean they will misuse it so much that you will wish you had never used the word 'democracy'.

-Beatrice Munah Sieh, Chief of Police of Liberia

Have students write a response using these sentence stems:

- Some problems Liberia faces as it transitions from authoritarian rule and civil war to democracy are...
- Freedom of speech and dissent are/not essential aspects of democracy because...
- An emerging democracy such as Liberia should deal with dissent by...
- In order for Liberia to become a "100% democracy" it would mean that...
- Some steps that must be taken in order to reach the goal of 100% democracy would be...
- Other countries could help Liberia develop and democratize by...
- The United Nations could help Liberia develop and democratize by...

Call on students to share different responses.

3. Divide students into small groups. Have them read and discuss the Carnegie Council's Special Report by Madeleine Lynn, "The Spread of Democracy" (http://www.cceia.org/resources/articles_papers_reports/5167.html), and "Universal Democracy? Prospects for a World Transformed," a discussion with Larry Diamond and Joanne Myers (<http://www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/4398.html>). Provide students with these guiding questions for their discussions:

- Why might democracy have been considered a “luxury that poorer non-European nations could not afford”?
- Why might democracy increasingly be seen as a “universal ideal” and not so much as a “Western ideal”?
- Why is “electoralism” not truly democracy? Why might it be a “first step” in a country’s transition to democracy? What could be other effective first steps?
- What does Winston Churchill mean in his 1947 statement? Explain why you agree or disagree.
- Larry Diamond says, “Doing it [transitioning to democracy] badly, and then failing is much worse in essence than not doing it at all.” What does he mean by this?

4. View the **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA** Video Module and prompt students to observe the involvement and roles of the Chinese and U.S. governments. Have students respond using the following prompts:

- Does the election of Johnson Sirleaf indicate a democratic transformation for Liberia?
- Why might China be interested in involvement in Liberia, and why would it be in Liberia’s interest to accept that diplomacy and aid?
- Why might the U.S. government be alarmed by China’s involvement in Liberia, and how should it respond?
- What should Liberia’s ideal relationship be with the U.S., China and other nations? What does Liberia stand to gain from these relationships?
- How does U.S. involvement in Liberia validate or contradict the United States’ commitment to promoting freedom and democracy around the world? How does U.S. involvement in Liberia support other government interests and goals?

Discuss and debate U.S. involvement in Liberia. The **IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Discussion Guide** provides additional discussion questions, and **Teacher Handout C** contains selected quotes from the film.

5. Assignment: Break students into small groups and have each group select a nation to research that is in some stage of adopting democratic principles. Examples are Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia, Russia, the Baltic states, Costa Rica, Mali, Portugal, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nicaragua, Ghana and Cape Verde. Topics to consider include:

- Historical and geographic background
- Conditions of infrastructure, debt, economy and employment
- Relationship with the United Nations
- Relationship with the United States and other nations that may be providing aid
- How the country’s citizens view democracy

Each group should include visual aids, research articles, maps, statistics, and quotes from politicians and other pertinent voices. Some good online resources include the websites of the International Foundation for Election Systems (<http://www.ifes.org>), the National Endowment for Democracy (<http://www.ned.org>) and the International IDEA Voter Turnout (<http://www.idea.int/vt/>). Each group should also examine the barriers that have hindered the country from adopting democratic principles and practices as well as the ways in which the country has been successful.

6. Have the class convene an international roundtable in which representatives from each country present their “State of Democracy” and debate and discuss practices and successes.

Extension Activity:

Explore and respond to the other resources cited in the Carnegie Council Special Report:

- “Universal Democracy? Prospects for a World Transformed,” a discussion with Larry Diamond and Joanne Myers (www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/4398.html)
- “What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building,” a discussion with Noah Feldman and Joanne Myers (www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/5087.html)
- “Multilateral Strategies to Promote Democracy: A Report of the Empire and Democracy Project,” panel discussion (www.cceia.org/resources/articles_papers_reports/1116.html)
- “The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace,” panel discussion (www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/5129.html)
- “Indonesian Democracy: New Hope,” a discussion with Theodore Friend and Joanne Myers (www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/5091.html)

Teacher Handout C: Supplemental Materials**IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Quotes****History**

"I think there's too many years of being through too many kinds of experiences. After a while you get hardened, and you take it all in stride, the good and the bad. Today's probably gonna surpass it all, I think for obvious reasons. You don't get inaugurated, for the first time in our country's history, as a woman, and Africa's represented here so fully."

--President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

"Women have not been, to the same extent as men, party to all of the bad things of the past, they certainly were very strong voices against the atrocities in Liberia in the war, and they fought very, very hard to make sure that the democratic process worked this time around. And so, this is our biggest opportunity to change Liberia."

--Antoinette Sayeh, Minister of Finance

"Taking over a country that has gone through fourteen years of war is very, very tedious. The police do not have guns, they do not have handcuffs. No vehicles . . . No, no resources, not even paper to write on."

--Beatrice Munah Sieh, Chief of Police

Gender

"They call me 'Iron Lady' because they feel I am very strict, tough. I want to prove a point: That woman can be trusted and placed in dangerous positions. And they can even do better."

--Beatrice Munah Sieh, Chief of Police

"All of the progress that we've made can be attributed to the fact that we've got strong women leadership in the government. These are all strong women that have led the processes of change and renewal. With all the problems and all the scares, I remain optimistic that Liberia will rise again."

--President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

"I must listen to them in a way that says, I want to hear you. I understand your plight. And that's the "O' Ma" approach. And it usually brings a positive reaction because I'm coming as a mother to listen to them."

--President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

"On Sunday, some arms arrived from Nigeria. Well, it make me feel like a real woman. I'm just kidding. I should be proud to look back, to say, well, they were afraid of the police, now they are friends of the police. I've helped to bring peace into my country."

--Beatrice Munah Sieh, Chief of Police

Democracy

"Liberia has progressed now, to have serious political debates, but trust me, Africa . . . 100% democracy...Is no way working. Especially right after the war. Because the people will say that's my right to sell in your living room. That's my right to scratch your car. I mean they will misuse it so much that you will wish you had never used the word 'democracy.'"

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"We have had many governments here in the recent past that have relied upon brute force, instilling fear into people. We say, that you can still, exercise leadership without repression. As far as I'm concerned so far, in this administration, it's working better than the use of force."

--President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

International Involvement

"The United States currently holds \$391 million dollars in outstanding bi-lateral claims on Liberia. We will cancel that debt. All of it. Under the framework for highly indebted countries."

--Condoleeza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State

"More than any other country, our partnership with the U.S. is the most valuable. After all, Liberia was founded by freed slaves from the U.S. And we've always been very dependent on that relationship."

—Siatta Scott-Johnson, Co-Director of IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA

"I think we depend upon the support of some of our partners, but I feel that in many instances we gave them some of our primary commodities in return. We gave huge benefits to their corporations, which operate here. So it's not one-sided."

—President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia

"Since 1847, Liberia has had this strong tie, I mean unbroken tie with America. But again we are frustrated. Because as a country that America gave birth to, we have not achieved anything like America. But now we see China coming in the picture."

—Siatta Scott-Johnson, Co-Director of IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA