

Activity 4

Women and Democracy
(90-120 minutes + assignments)



“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



COMMUNITY
CLASSROOM

Women and Democracy

(90-120 minutes + assignments)

Objectives: Students will

- analyze and critically view film as text and pull out quotations for further discussion
- participate in small-group and class discussions
- learn about women in prominent positions in the U.S. government
- make inferences from public statements about a politician's views
- present a persuasive argument about the impact of women on government

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

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

From the Women's Suffrage movement in the United States to Africa's first elected female president to the possibility of the United States' first female presidential nominee from a major party, the voice of women in democracy has been and continues to be a critical struggle. In this lesson, students examine the significant women-led administration of Liberia and consider whether the world's governments would be different with more women in power. Students will also consider the ways in which notable women in American politics have challenged government to change or maintain the status quo.

Procedures

1. Divide a chart paper into two sides: "Should" and "Should Not." Have students brainstorm what women/girls "should" like to do, what they "should" be like and how they "should" act based on stereotypes in the media, popular culture and society at large. Do the same for the "Should Not" side.
2. Discuss using the following guiding questions:
 - How do you, your friends and adults you know fit these stereotypes? How are they different from these stereotypes?
 - How do these stereotypes of how women/girls "should" and "should not" be influence some people your age?
 - Name some women you know personally or have seen in the news or popular culture who do not fit these stereotypes.
 - How might these stereotypes affect women in leadership positions?
 - How might women in leadership positions challenge these stereotypes?
3. Introduce this quotation from IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA:

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

–Beatrice Munah Sieh, Chief of Police of Liberia

Have students write a response using this sentence stem:

- The United States and other countries around the world might be slow in accepting women in top leadership positions because...

Have the class share and then call on a few students to read their sentences.

4. View the IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA Video Module and prompt students to observe President Johnson Sirleaf and her interactions and dealings with the citizens of Liberia, corporations and world leaders. While they watch, have students record quotations from various speakers that reveal attitudes toward the president and the other women leaders for further reference and discussion after the film, for example:

Name	Description	Quotation
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	President of Liberia	
Beatrice Munah Sieh	Chief of Police of Liberia	
Former soldier	Leader/spokesperson for the Armed Forces of Liberia (deactivated military)	"That's the right way, Ma."

NOTE: See **Student Handout B: Speaker and Quotes Grid**

5. Think-Pair-Share

- Think – Choose one of the quotations from your chart. Write a journal response using these questions: What is the speaker's view of the President and/or the women in government? If you could respond to the statement, what would you say?
- Pair – With a partner, compare what you wrote about your respective speakers. Discuss using the following guiding questions: Would the two speakers agree with each other? What would they say in response to each other's statements? Which of the speakers most represents your view?
- Share – You and your partner share with the class using these speaking stems: We agree with _____ , who says... /We disagree with _____ , who says...

6. Explain that the class will now look at quotes from past and present women in positions of power in government. Note to teachers: Also research local female politicians and community leaders to include in the list of quotations. Distribute the quotes in Teacher Handout B to students in the class who will read them aloud and identify the speaker.

Have students discuss their initial reactions to the quotations using these speaking stems:

- A voice that stood out to me was _____ because ...
- I think she means that ...

7. Assignment: Research Project

Do further research on one of the women quoted above or research another woman in a position of power in government (community, local, state, national or international; historical or contemporary). Research should include biographical information, more quotes, speeches or writings, and analysis of the woman's views on gender, politics and leadership. Some good online sources include the International IDEA's page "Voter Turnout by Gender" (www.idea.int/gender/vt.cfm) and the WSS of the Association of College and Research Libraries' page "Women and Politics" (<http://www.libr.org/wss/wsslinks/politics.html>). Create a multimedia presentation that includes information from the research. This should be on poster board or overhead transparencies or in the form of a PowerPoint presentation and may include video clips, sound files and images, along with text highlights.

Extension Activities:

1. Invite a panel of guest speakers to come into the classroom to address student questions and comments about women in politics and community leadership positions. Use the expertise of the panel members to learn more about what it is like to be a woman in politics. Include politicians from your local city and county governments, directors of local advocacy and nonprofit organizations, and local business leaders. Have students prepare questions for the panel in advance.

NOTE: See **Teacher Handout A: Guidelines for Convening a Community Forum.**

2. Write an opinion-editorial piece arguing whether governments and politics are run differently when women are in positions of power. Use selections from the quotations exercise and make inferences as to what the statements say about the speaker's philosophies and views on government. Support your opinion with additional background information and address opposing viewpoints and counter-arguments. Make predictions about the future of the U.S. government and the role of women politicians in it.

Teacher Handout A: Guidelines for Convening a Community Forum

Inviting community members into the classroom to share their insights and expertise can enhance student's learning by showing how the issues they are studying affect people around them. Consider inviting community members who represent multiple perspectives so the discussion can reflect the complexity of a particular issue as well as the diversity of your state and community. Introducing students to the contributing roles of scholars, advocates and policy-makers, along with those most affected by a policy or program emulates a process of good information gathering. An appropriately facilitated discussion with opposing viewpoints also helps build understanding of democratic debate. If possible, involve students in researching and inviting the local panel members and developing the discussion questions. An outcome of this activity might be to connect students to service learning or other mentoring opportunities with community organizations.

Planning a Panel

STEP 1: Using the Educator Guide, determine which Activity area you would like to focus on and incorporate a Community Forum.

STEP 2: Using the table below as a guide, develop a plan for your preferred panel participants.

STEP 3: Using the Educator Guide and the Discussion Guide, compile a list of potential discussion questions to share with potential panelists.

STEP 4: Using your knowledge of community organizations, your student's contacts and research with some of the search tools provided, recruit your panelists.

STEP 5: Plan the format of your forum, finalize the discussion questions, select or designate a facilitator.

Here is a list of organizations that might assist you with identifying representatives for a community panel.

Suggested Panel Members	Organization examples	Search Tools
Campaign staff of a local, state or federal office-holder	Congress.org National Conference of State Legislators National Association of Counties	www.congress.org (search by ZIP code for local, state and congressional representatives http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Find_a_County&Template=/cfiles/counties/usamap.cfm
Government watch-dog organizations	Common Cause League of Women Voters	www.commoncause.org (search State Organizations) www.lwv.org (search "find a local league")
Women political leaders	Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers	http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts4.html (search by state)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Handout B: Speaker and Quotes Grid

Directions: As you watch the film record speakers and quotations that reveal attitudes toward the president and the other women leaders:

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Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	President of Liberia	
Beatrice Munah Sieh	Chief of Police of Liberia	
Former soldier	Leader/spokesperson for the Armed Forces of Liberia (deactivated military)	"That's the right way, Ma."