



FLAG WARS – LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES:

Students will

- consider how zoning policy shapes the character of neighborhoods
- see how zoning and loan policies have been used historically in the U.S. to benefit some people and discriminate against others
- examine the tensions between First Amendment rights and zoning practices
- examine the tensions between private property rights and public interests
- learn about the role of housing policy in municipal politics
- practice persuasive speaking and writing
- practice negotiating skills

GRADE LEVEL: 9 – adult

MATERIALS: film clip from *Flag Wars*; access to Internet for research

ESTIMATED TIME: If research is done outside class, 4-5 class periods spread out over at least three weeks to allow for research and meetings in between steps.

BACKGROUND:

Flag Wars is a film that explores a range of complex issues arising from the gentrification of a Columbus, Ohio neighborhood. This lesson plan focuses on one aspect of those issues – zoning laws. Because they aren't yet at a life stage that involves securing housing, most students haven't thought much about restrictions on property use or mortgage and business loan policies. This activity provides a way to look at those restrictions and policies, and examine their political implications, Constitutional foundations, and consequences on the daily lives of ordinary citizens. It also helps students tie current situations to historical practice.

In addition, both the film and this lesson can help students explore institutional racism, a form of racism that differs from the more blatant racial slurs or overt discrimination with which students may be more familiar.

ACTIVITY:

Step 1: Divide the class into three groups and assign each one of the following identities:

Zoning Board members today

Zoning Board members from the 1950s

Community members with issues to bring before the Zoning Board

Step 2: Give the groups the following assignments

Group One: Zoning Board members today – Research current zoning laws governing the area around our school and be prepared to apply them in making judgments about issues that community members bring before you.

Group Two: Zoning Board members from a mythical post World War II new suburban community – If you have access to the records from such a community, study and be prepared to apply them in making judgments about issues that community members bring before you. If you do not have access to such records, examine federal housing and loan policy to see what was and was not permitted in post-war suburban communities and be prepared to apply the general principles of those federal policies to the issues that community members will bring before you.

As an alternative, you might have this group represent the zoning board governing the area around your school.

Note to teacher: No more than 3-4 students should be assigned to each of the Zoning Board Groups.

Group Three: Community members – You are property owners in the neighborhood. Each person (or pair) should take on one of the following identities and be prepared to present your case before the Zoning Board:

- A homeowner who wants to paint his/her house in school color stripes
- A homeowner & artist who wants to display a hand-carved wood sign above the front door with name, address, and family crest*
- An apartment building owner wants to prevent tenants from displaying large peace signs in their windows.
- A restaurant owner who runs a restaurant across the street from a large church and wants to apply for a liquor license
- A property owner who demolished two dangerous, burnt out houses and cleaned up the site wants to put up a gas station on the now empty corner lot
- Two homeowners who have recently bought older houses in the neighborhood want to have their block officially designated as an historical district.*
- A real estate developer who wants to build a hundred-unit apartment building for low income renters on the lot of a former grocery store that has been closed and empty for more than a year*
- A citizen who wants to close down the area's liquor store*
- An owner of a small apartment building wants to rent the side of the building to a billboard company
- A homeowner or renter who wants to give public tours of their private art collection*
- A citizen who wants to close down a video store that rents adult videos
- A homeowner who has a car up on cinder blocks in his/her side yard*
- A homeowner who has a beat up old couch sitting out on the front porch
- A homeowner who wants to display a large confederate flag hung from the front porch
- The owner of a vacant lot wants to lease the property to a waste disposal firm so they can store hospital waste between the time they collect it and the time they transport it to special, permanent disposal sites
- A homeowner who wants to display a portrait of Nelson Mandela in their front window
- A homeowner across the street from the school wants to convert her/his garage into a drive-through coffee business

Note to Teacher: The list of identities for Group 3 is flexible. If there are local issues that have been debated, substitute those issues. Feel free to tailor identities to the ethnic, religious, rural-urban, and/or racial identities present in your community (e.g., place the restaurant next to a synagogue rather than a church). Students may also add to their identities (e.g., making up explanations for why what they want to do is important to them). The identities indicated with an (*) are based on things from the film.

Step 3: To get the students focused, show *Flag Wars*. If time allows, watch the entire film. If not, just view two clips:

1. From the beginning of the film through the scene in which the Chief is trying to get a neighbor to sign his petition. The final lines are the Chief saying “I’ll do that and I’ll come back.” Roger Bohn (the neighbor) responds “Excellent.” [Timecode: start 00:00 , end 21:10]
2. From the first appearance of Floyd Goode – scene of black couples sitting around a kitchen table. Floyd says “This over across the street here, you can’t match what he got out of the bank for that...” through Terry Toone saying “Yeah, they don’t want you...” End before scene with the Reverend and Chuck Spingola begins. [Timecode: start 34:20 , end 44:19]

If you have time to discuss the films, do so. You may want to look at the *Flag Wars* Discussion Guide for ideas: http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/flagwars/resources_guide.html.

After the film, let students begin their research. Each group will need to investigate what rights property owners have under the U.S. Constitution (especially regarding freedom of speech and due process), and how those rights are related to the Declaration of Independence’s vision that every citizen have a right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. They will also need to know zoning laws. Depending on the prior knowledge of your group, you may also need to review the distinctions between various levels of government: federal, state, county, and municipal.

Group One can obtain from municipal officials a copy of the zoning laws that actually govern their neighborhood.

The historical board (Group Two) can look at the Housing Act of 1934, National Housing Act of 1949, and the FHA Underwriting Manual (see resources). These documents provided the foundation for policies in practice following World War II and the expansion in housing spurred by the GI Bill. For a quick summary of the impact of these policies, check:

http://www.pbs.org/race/006_WhereRaceLives/006_00-home.htm. Note that the historical board will have to guess at local zoning laws based on what they learn from federal documents. So, for example, they might assume that restrictive covenants barring Jews or people of color from neighborhoods should be enforced and should make their judgments accordingly.

The community members (Group Three) should present as if they were making requests today and should also have copies of current municipal policy.

All groups can look at the background resources on housing policy, zoning, and gentrification at the *Flag Wars* website: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/flagwars>. Especially helpful will be the “History of Housing and Zoning” section.

Step 4: Take one or two class periods (depending on the number of presentations you have) to convene the Zoning Boards. Both boards will meet to hear the same community members at the same time. Part of the activity will be to see if both boards come to the same decisions, and if not, why not.

Community members should be given time limits for their presentations and should practice presenting orally. They should also submit to the Boards written summaries of their requests. This will provide an opportunity to practice both persuasive writing and public speaking.

Step 5: After the Zoning Boards have had a chance to deliberate, take a class period and have them present their decisions, both orally and in writing. Lead a discussion on what students noticed about:

- Tensions between zoning laws and an individual’s First Amendment right to free speech.
- Tensions between community need (public good) and individual private property rights.
- Differences between current practice and legalized discriminatory practices in post-World War II America, including how discriminatory lending and zoning practices restricted poorer people and people of color to particular urban neighborhoods and kept them out of newer suburban developments, and how the equity in homes built over generations grew for the folks in suburban neighborhoods but stayed stagnant or declined for residents of urban neighborhoods, resulting in

some kinds of people being more likely than others to have funds to invest in fixing up homes now.

- Existing zoning laws where they live (Are they fair?)

EXTENSIONS:

View the entire *Flag Wars* film. Practice conflict resolution skills by asking students to discuss what strategies they would use to help neighbors come together to improve the neighborhood.

Have students attend local zoning meetings to observe or to present an issue related to their own neighborhoods.

Invite a local lawyer, politician, or zoning board official to class to answer questions about current housing issues and the rights of individual citizens and property owners.

As an adaptation or a part of assessment, have students walk the neighborhood around their homes and/or school and draw conclusions about what they think existing zoning laws are. Then compare their educated guesses with the actual codes.

RESOURCES:

www.pbs.org/pov/flagwars - In addition to more information about the film, this site provides more advanced resources and links on housing, zoning, and gentrification issues.

www.hud.gov - The site of the federal department of Housing and Urban Development includes a wide range of information on housing issues.

<http://tigger.uic.edu/~wplotk1/deeds/www/fha36.html> - For information on the Federal Housing Authority policy and practice of the 1950s, see the racial provisions of the FHA Underwriting Manual

www.developmentleadership.net/current/worksheet.htm - article, “The Impact of Institutional Racism on Community Development”

www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs - Has several useful articles, including Robert A. Beauregard’s “Federal Policy and Postwar Urban Decline: A Case of Government Complicity?”

www1.umn.edu/irp/publications/final1.htm – Report on segregation in urban centers

Eugenie Birch, “Housing and Urban Communities” in Jonathan Barnett, ed., *Planning for a New Century* (Island Press, 2000)

RELATED LEARNING STANDARDS:

This activity can help address a variety of Civics, History, and Language Arts standards. Examples from www.mcrel.org include:

CIVICS:

Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy

Standard 25: Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights

Understands interplay between personal rights, economic rights, the rule of law (including zoning), and a vigilant citizenry

Standard 26: Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights

Understands different positions on a contemporary conflict between rights such as one person's right to free speech versus another person's right to be heard; knows examples of situations in which personal, political, or economic rights are in conflict; understands the relationship between political rights and the economic right to acquire, use, transfer, and dispose of property

Standard 27: Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities

Understands the distinction between personal and civic responsibilities and the tensions that may arise between them, the importance of each citizen reflecting on, criticizing, and reaffirming basic constitutional principles, and the importance of dispositions that foster respect for individual worth and human dignity such as compassion and respect for the rights and choices of individuals

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Standard 29: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy

Understands why becoming knowledgeable about public affairs and the values and principles of American constitutional democracy, and communicating that knowledge to others are important forms of participation, and understands the argument that constitutional democracy requires the participation of an attentive, knowledgeable, and competent citizenry; and
Understands how awareness of the nature of American constitutional change gives citizens the ability to reaffirm or change fundamental constitutional values

Also see Civics:

Standard 1: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government

Standard 2: Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments

Standard 3: Understands the sources, purposes, and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good

Standard 9: Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

Standard 18: Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights

Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING:

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective

Understands how the past affects our private lives and society in general

UNITED STATES HISTORY - Era 9 - Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s):

Standard 26 & 28: Understands the economic boom, domestic politics, and social transformation of post-World War II United States

Understands the socioeconomic factors and discriminatory lending and zoning practices of the post-World War II period in America (e.g., the gap between poverty and the rising affluence of the middle class, the extent of poverty in post-World War II America)

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved (e.g., the current debate over affirmative action and to what degree affirmative action policies have reached their goals; the evolution of government support for the rights of the disabled; the emergence of the Gay Liberation Movement and civil rights of gay Americans; continuing debates over multiculturalism, bilingual education, and group identity and rights vs. individual rights and identity; successes and failures of the modern feminist movement)

LANGUAGE ARTS :

Writing

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

1. Uses criteria to evaluate own and others' effectiveness in group discussions and formal presentations (e.g., accuracy, relevance, and organization of information; clarity of delivery; relationships among purpose, audience, and content; types of arguments used; effectiveness of own contributions)
3. Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension (e.g., focuses attention on message, monitors message for clarity and understanding, asks relevant questions, provides verbal and nonverbal feedback, notes cues such as change of pace or particular words that indicate a new point is about to be made; uses abbreviation system to record information quickly; selects and organizes essential information)
4. Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes (e.g., to defend a position, to entertain, to inform, to persuade)
5. Makes formal presentations to the class (e.g., includes definitions for clarity; supports main ideas using anecdotes, examples, statistics, analogies, and other evidence; uses visual aids or technology, such as transparencies, slides, electronic media; cites information sources)
7. Uses a variety of verbal and nonverbal techniques for presentations (e.g., modulation of voice; varied inflection; tempo; enunciation; physical gestures; rhetorical questions; word choice,

including figurative language, standard English, informal usage, technical language) and demonstrates poise and self-control while presenting

8. Responds to questions and feedback about own presentations (e.g., clarifies and defends ideas, expands on a topic, uses logical arguments, modifies organization, evaluates effectiveness, sets goals for future presentations)