

BECOMING US

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL IN 1963

How Can We Provide a Better Education for Boston's African American Students?

Educator Guide



Children from the Boardman School walk down Monroe Street in Roxbury, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Boston, in 1962. Northeastern University Libraries, Freedom House Photographs, Irene Shwachman Photos.



These deliberation guides by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History examine the complexities, choices, and tensions of a moment in history to understand how real people and communities were impacted by watershed events, often outside their control. Studying history in this way, as a topic that is dynamic and discoverable, provides a powerful venue to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are key to understanding the past, making sense of the present, and shaping a more just and inclusive future.

This resource connects to the student deliberation guide on the years leading up to the busing controversy in Boston during the 1970s. The tensions surrounding the integration of Boston’s public schools by busing white students to predominantly Black schools and Black students to predominantly white schools echoed similar tensions in school districts across the United States. The years leading up to this decision witnessed determined efforts by Black parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members to advocate for educational equity for Black children in Boston; it is this struggle upon which our deliberation focuses. As students investigate the cultural, historical, and political context of this time, they will wrestle with and weigh possible answers to the question: How can we provide a better education for Boston’s African American students?

Through this learning experience, students will develop and practice their ability to participate in a deliberation. Deliberations provide students with a structured forum for learning to identify multiple (and often underrepresented) perspectives on an issue; empathize with human experiences different from their own; recognize possible solutions and deal with inherent tradeoffs; and collaborate with others to listen, build ideas, and look for shared understandings.

This educator guide contains information and suggested strategies for facilitating the deliberation.

- **Historical Context: Brief information about the controversy surrounding racial discrimination in Boston’s public schools during the 1960s**
- **Student Learning Objectives: Expectations of what students should accomplish by participating in the deliberation.**
- **Recommended Procedures and Pacing: Suggested learning tasks to prepare for, participate in, and reflect on the outcomes of the historic decisions deliberation.**
- **What Happened Next?: Information about historic events that took place after this deliberation.**
- **Standards: Alignment with national and state standards for historical knowledge and critical thinking.**
- **Appendix: Facilitation strategies and recommendations.**

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Like many urban areas in the United States, Boston in the early 1960s was fraught with racial divisions. Although the US Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision had overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine and thus opened the door for the desegregation of public schools, the ruling did not reverse decades of *de facto* separation, often a product of long-established residential patterns and decisions by local school officials. In Boston and in many other areas across the United States, Black students continued to attend predominantly Black schools, which were chronically underfunded, under-resourced, and overcrowded. White students attended predominantly white schools, which received more resources, funding, and support from municipal governments.

For years, African American parents, teachers, school administrators, and other community members had fought to support Black students in Boston's public school system. They had lobbied for more funding for primarily Black schools while proposing plans that would even out the school district's racially polarized distribution of students. However, their efforts were largely ignored. Even with the help of powerful organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which served as one of the crucial vehicles by which Black educational activists pursued reforms, change proved incremental at best. This guide focuses on the decisions faced by Black educational activists during and after the summer of 1963, a pivotal moment in the history of Boston's public school system.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Analyze multiple perspectives of members of the Black educational activist community in Boston in the 1960s, using primary and secondary resources to evaluate possible options for addressing structural racial discrimination in Boston's public schools.**
- **Evaluate the benefits and tradeoffs of a particular decision or action through a facilitated deliberation with classmates.**
- **Practice participating in respectful and productive discussions of complex issues with peers.**

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES AND PACING

The following lesson plan is divided into three sections with suggested times for each. However, each section should be taught according to your students' abilities and needs.

Lesson 1: Preparing for Deliberation (45 minutes)

Student tasks:

- 1. Define deliberation, including what it is and is not.**
- 2. Collaboratively determine class norms for discussions.**
- 3. Develop knowledge and understanding of the topic by analyzing primary and secondary sources.**

THINK

1. How do we make decisions?

- Ask students to think of the decisions they made before coming to this class today. Have them list these on a piece of paper. These can be decisions of any size and significance. Explain that we make decisions all the time, some without even thinking about it, that affect the outcome of our day and possibly even more than that.
- From their list, have students select one decision that required the most time, thought, or energy. Have them turn to a partner and discuss the decision they have chosen to focus on. What was their process for making their choice? Did they weigh pros and cons? Did they ask for advice from others? How long did it take to make their choice?
- As a group, discuss what decision-making looks like. Using examples from the students' discussions, create a shared definition of decision-making and record their ideas on the board. Then, highlight or circle elements that reflect *effective* decision-making. Reflect on what good decision-making feels like and the type of time, effort, and consideration required to make thoughtful choices.

2. What is a deliberation?

- Explain that in this lesson, they will participate in an important kind of decision-making process called a deliberation. In a deliberation, a group of people come together around one question or topic to examine different courses of action.
- Describe the key elements of a deliberation. In a deliberation there are many voices around the table, which helps the group identify and think about different perspectives on the issue. Participants are guided to look at different possible solutions and the trade-offs that come with those decisions.
- Note that a deliberation is different from a debate or discussion.
 - A debate is competitive, generally set up with opposing sides, and ends with one winner and one or more losers. Deliberations, on the other hand, are collaborative.
 - Discussions are more free-flowing and do not necessarily have an end goal of making a decision. They are opportunities to share ideas and learn from others. Deliberations do that too, but they also intentionally look at the topic from multiple perspectives and examine the trade-offs of various possible actions.

COLLABORATE

1. Have students create a set of shared norms that will guide their conversation. Students should think about what actions and attitudes they think will help the class have an effective deliberation.
2. Record norms on an anchor chart somewhere visible in the room and read them out loud. Suggested norms include:
 - **Be respectful and open to new ideas.**
 - **Share the floor.**
 - **Stay on topic.**
 - **Everyone participates.**
 - **Seek first to understand, then to speak.**
3. When the students feel that their list is complete, remind them that they are responsible for both adhering to and helping others follow these norms.

ACT

1. Inform students that they will be assessing possible options for responding to race-based educational inequities in Boston during the 1960s.
2. Explain that during this time period, African American parents and other community members in Boston were faced with a significant decision that students will examine in this deliberation. Black parents and other activists had to answer the question: How can provide a better education for Boston's African American students?
3. Note that in order to understand this experience and evaluate the options, students must prepare by learning about the historical context, including the actions that parents and community members had already undertaken to address discrimination. Distribute the *Separate and Unequal in 1963* student deliberation guide and instruct students to read the first portion, which is a short essay. Encourage students to annotate the text as they read. They will examine the options in the next section.

After reading both sections, debrief with students to ensure they understand the information included in the narrative.

Lesson 2: The Deliberation [45 minutes]

Classroom arrangement: As feasible, arrange students' desks and/or chairs in a circle.

Student tasks:

- 1. Individually set expectations and goals for participating in the deliberation.**
- 2. Critically examine the question, each option, and the associated trade-offs through discussion with classmates.**

THINK

1. Explain that students will be participating in their deliberation during this class. Refer to the norms set by the students during the previous lesson and remind them of their responsibility to both follow and help others adhere to these guidelines.
2. Review the roles of both the students and the teacher. Explain that the role of the teacher is to facilitate the conversation. This means the teacher's role is to ensure the deliberation runs well, but the teacher is a neutral participant and will not add opinions to the conversation. Students will be active participants.

Students are expected to become "visitors to the past" and should not attempt to role-play as individuals in Boston's African American community. Role-playing can lead to harmful stereotypes being perpetuated and limit students' opportunity to learn about history in an inclusive and respectful way.

3. Ask each student to think individually about how they want to participate in the conversation. This is an opportunity for them to work on their own discussion skills. For example, those who often dominate discussions may consider how they can do more active listening. And those who may choose to listen should think about how they can share their voices more frequently. Have each student write down their answer to the question: How will I participate?

COLLABORATE

1. Review the main deliberative question: How can we provide a better education for Boston's African American students? Ask students to think about what connections they have to the topic and question at hand. Ask for volunteers to describe their connection in the topic. Doing this helps set the tone for the deliberation as one that involves real people and experiences.
2. Remind students that their goal is to work collaboratively to evaluate a set of options. They may or may not agree on the best option to select. Before they do this, however, they must think carefully about each proposed option and solutions. Have students read the three options, keeping the following questions in mind:
 - a. What does this option propose or recommend?
 - b. What steps would have to be taken to make this option work?
 - c. What would be positive outcomes of moving forward with this option? Why would people want to choose this approach?
 - d. What are trade-offs or downsides that would have to be accepted if this option is chosen? Are these trade-offs worth it?

3. Open up a conversation by examining the options as a class. Have students carefully think through and discuss each option, its associated actions, and its trade-offs. Encourage students to listen closely, to respectfully respond to their classmates, to bring up insights they feel must be considered, and to share their response to each option.

Facilitation note: Pay attention to how students are engaging throughout the deliberation. This information will be useful in the next lesson to help students reflect not only on the decisions they make but also how they contributed to the discussion. One way to keep track of their participation is to use a [Harkness diagram](#), which captures the flow of conversation.

ACT

1. Conclude the deliberation by asking students if they can come to a common-ground decision on their recommended path forward for Boston's African American parents and community activists. They may be creative in their solution-building by combining preferred elements of different options, as long as they stay within the bounds of reality and incorporate the many perspectives and people affected by the issue. They may also decide that no single option can be agreed upon.
2. If the group comes to a shared conclusion, post the decision somewhere visible and review it as a class. Ask:
 - a. What actions are they proposing? Why are these important or necessary?
 - b. What trade-offs would have to be made with this approach? Are those acceptable trade-offs?
 - c. Who would be impacted, positively or negatively, by this solution?
 - d. Why is this the right solution for our group?

If the class is unable to come to a shared decision, post the approaches with the most support somewhere visible. Help students think through each option, identifying what they like, what they could do without, and how it would affect different groups of people.

Lesson 3: Reflecting on the Deliberation (45 minutes)

Student Tasks:

- 1. Assess their own participation in the deliberation.**
- 2. Reflect as a class on the actions they preferred and compare this with actual historical outcomes.**
- 3. Identify connections between this historical topic and current issues.**

THINK

1. Instruct students to individually reflect on their experiences during the deliberation. Ask them to write or draw their responses to the prompts below:
 - a. Think critically about your own participation in the deliberation. Did you reach your participation goals?
 - b. What actions did you take that you are proud of? What would you like to improve for future discussions?
 - c. How has your thinking about listening to the ideas of others changed?
2. Have students share feedback about their decision-making process. They should identify areas where they felt the group excelled and where there are opportunities for growth. Help students maintain a supportive atmosphere by reminding them of their class norms before going into this discussion.
3. Encourage students to share and discuss their responses with others. This can be done by talking with a partner, contributing to a larger class conversation, or posting their responses on the board using sticky notes.

COLLABORATE

1. Share information from the “What Happened Next?” section of the teacher guide. Remind students that the goal of this deliberation was not to “get it right,” but rather to experience how groups come together to determine what they will do in the face of complex and challenging questions.
2. Have students work in small groups to assess the information using the prompts below:
 - a. What decision or decisions were made?
 - b. What external factors affected the decision-making process?
 - c. Who may have agreed or disagreed with these decisions?

ACT


1. Ask students to reflect on and share their responses to the questions:
 - a. How has your thinking about this topic changed?
 - b. Does this topic connect to any modern issues or events? Which ones?
 - c. Can this history help us better understand those events and issues? How?
2. Have students reflect on and share their ideas about how deliberation could be used to better understand multiple perspectives on these modern-day issues.
3. Individually or in pairs, have students set at least one goal for how they will continue to use what they have learned from this deliberation as they examine other historic topics and current events.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Following several inconclusive meetings with the Boston School Committee (BSC) during the summer of 1963, Boston's Black educational activists doubled down on their efforts to achieve equity for Black students in Boston's public schools. They organized sit-ins, picketed the BSC's offices, and marshalled thousands in public marches denouncing de facto segregation, attracting high-profile national civil rights leaders to highlight their cause.

**Why we march with
Dr. Martin Luther King**

We march today with Dr. Martin Luther King to protest the sufferings endured by the citizens of Boston.



WE MARCH TO CITY HALL

- To protest the exclusion of the poor from anti-poverty planning.
- To protest the bad faith of public officials in failing to enforce our housing codes.
- To protest continued segregation in public housing.

In short, we march to protest the lie that a New Boston can be built without social justice.

✓ WE MARCH TO THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

To protest poor and racially imbalanced schools, and demand a commitment by the School Committee to a program and timetable to end this educational genocide, beginning September 1965.

To call on the citizens of Boston to repudiate the School Committee majority which says:

- "These Negro parents have no background, they are just a pair of hands."
- "We do not have inferior schools; what we have been getting is an inferior type of child."
- "White parents don't want their children to go to school with backward Negroes."

Will YOU Join Us?

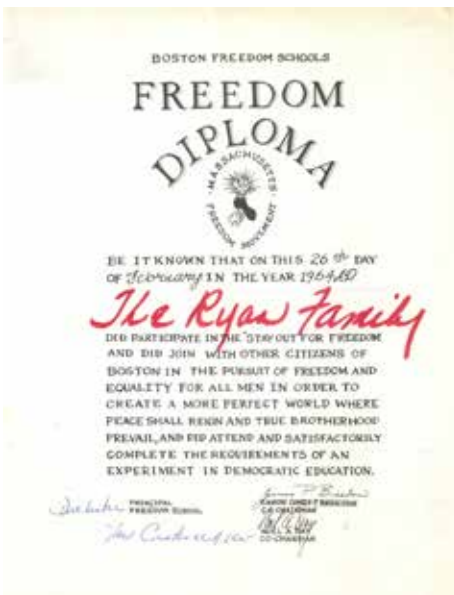
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Flyer promoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s participation in a 1965 desegregation march. Northeastern University Library.

In June 1963 and February 1964, activists mounted successful “Freedom Stay-Out” school boycotts; the 1964 boycott involved more than 20% of the junior high school and senior high school student body in Boston’s public schools, in addition to students from nearby suburbs. Many who participated in the boycotts attended “Freedom Schools,” alternative schools that introduced students to curriculum on Black history, nonviolent resistance, and student participation in civil rights movements. The one-day Freedom Schools served as models for schools developed in later years that aimed to provide similar curriculum and offer more community control of schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods.



1964's multiracial “Freedom Stay-Out” Boycotts and Freedom Schools. Northeastern University Library.



Freedom Schools diploma, 1964. Northeastern University Library.

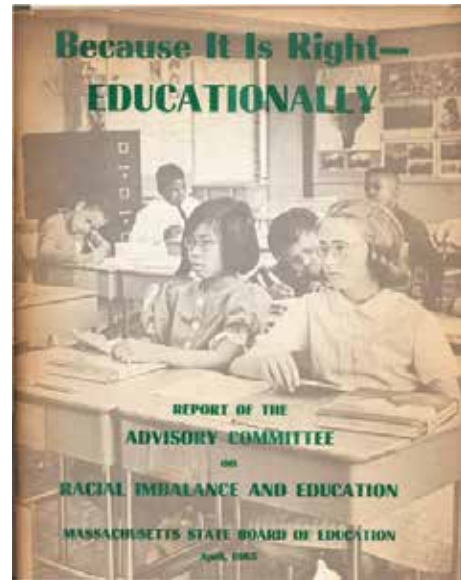


1966 newspaper article describing opening of a community school by Black parents and activists in Boston. Northeastern University Library.

In addition, many Black parents sought out better schools for their children, pooling their resources and forging coalitions to send Black students in overcrowded schools to less crowded and better resourced schools in both the city and its suburbs. The NAACP and its allies prodded the Massachusetts legislature into passing a law penalizing school districts that were “racially imbalanced.” Two commissions—one federal, one state—concluded that Boston’s public school system perpetuated segregated and unequal learning facilities and set out specific recommendations to remedy the problem. These efforts, however, failed to move the BSC to take action on behalf of Boston’s Black students.



In 1965, Black parents organized Operation Exodus to transport their children from overcrowded majority-Black schools to higher-performing majority-white schools with available seats. One year later, a coalition of city and suburban activists founded METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) to transport Black Boston students to suburban schools. Boston Globe, Boston Research Collection.



Kiernan Commission Report, 1965. Northeastern University Library.



Students and teachers in Operation Exodus, 1964. Northeastern University Library.

In the end, it would be a legal challenge brought by the Boston NAACP in federal court against the BSC that brought about the desegregation of Boston’s public school system. In 1974 Judge Arthur Garrity ruled that Boston’s schools be immediately desegregated via busing. Buses carried Black students to predominantly white schools and vice versa. This unleashed a wave of protest—sometimes violent—by white parents and community members who decried efforts to send their children to lower-performing schools and welcome Black students to theirs. Busing initially spawned race-based bitterness and animosity, but by the mid-1980s, when Garrity relinquished control over the program, it had helped to even out the racial imbalances present in the public school system.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The three individuals profiled in the student deliberation guide went on to distinguished careers as activists, scholars, and civic leaders:

Paul Parks

After the June 1963 meeting between the NAACP Education Committee and the Boston School Committee, Paul Parks continued to support Ruth Batson's work with his data analysis skills. He looked at employment disparities, the economic effects of policy changes, and differences between Black and white students' reading scores. This information laid an important foundation for his community's ongoing efforts at pressing for change in Boston's public schools. He succeeded Ruth Batson as chair of the Boston NAACP Education Committee and helped plan and develop both Operation Exodus and the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO).

In 1975 Parks was appointed Massachusetts's first African American Secretary of Education. In the 1990s, after the BSC was changed from an elected to an appointed body, he was selected to serve as its chairman.

Ruth Batson

Troubled by what she perceived as a lack of action on the part of the BSC, Ruth Batson helped found the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity. METCO was a program funded by federal, state, and private money that supported Black students transferring to predominantly white schools in the Boston suburbs. The program grew from serving 220 students in 1966 to over 3,000 students in the mid-1970s and still exists today. Batson went on to serve as director of Boston University's consultation and education program, director of the university's school desegregation research project, and associate professor at its School of Medicine's Division of Psychiatry.

Jean McGuire

When activists planned the Freedom Stay-Out boycotts, Jean McGuire helped develop and run the alternative educational experiences called Freedom Schools—which were taught by volunteers, many of them Black Boston public school teachers, and focused on Black history, nonviolent resistance, and student participation in past civil rights movements. She helped found METCO in 1966 and served as its executive director from 1973 until 2016. In 1981 she became the first African American woman to be elected to the Boston School Committee, a position she held for the next ten years.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional information and learning materials about the Boston busing crisis during the 1970s can be found here: <https://americanhistory.si.edu/becoming-us/education/resistance-school-desegregation>

This educator's guide and the companion student deliberation guide are part of the National Museum of American History's *Becoming Us* curricula, a comprehensive teaching toolkit on immigration and migration history in the United States. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/becoming-us/>

STANDARDS

National Council for the Social Studies: College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

GRADES 6–8

- **D2.His.4.6–8.** Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- **D2.His.16.6–8.** Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.
- **D4.6.6–8.** Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

GRADES 9–12

- **D2.His.4.9–12.** Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- **D2.His.16.9–12.** Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.
- **D4.6.9–12.** Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Anchor Standards (K–12) for Literacy

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1.**
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

ANCHOR STANDARDS (GRADES K–12) FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1.**
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3.**
Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4.**
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9–10.1.**
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11–12.1.**
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

APPENDIX

FACILITATION STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATORS

This deliberative issue guide gives students the chance to lead and engage in their own conversation in which they can examine concepts and issues, learn through discussion, encounter new perspectives, and find common ground with others. As the facilitator, your role is to guide, rather than lead, this discussion.

What does it mean to be a facilitator?

Your job is to support the students as they think critically and engage in thoughtful discussions about complex concepts of democracy. Being a facilitator can be challenging during a lively and engaging discussion because it requires you to be a neutral guide rather than a participant with an opinion.

However, this does not mean that the facilitator is passive! You are impartial about the topic, but not about the process. The facilitator must pay close attention to both the spoken and unspoken dynamics of the conversation to ensure that students feel welcomed and engaged, that the discussion remains civil and thoughtful, and that the activity achieves its intended goals.

This to-do list can help you get started:

Be Prepared!

- Understand the activity thoroughly. Brainstorm what ideas and views might be brought up and what might not be said. Be prepared to carefully present unvoiced perspectives to help the class dig deeper into a question or prompt.
- Prepare prompting questions in advance, like “What do you think?” “Can you explain your thoughts?” “What example or evidence could you share to help us better understand what you are describing?”

Set the Scene

- Go over the objectives so students understand their expectations and the goals of the activity.
- Review any procedures or rules.

Manage the Discussion

- Keep track of who is talking.
- Take notes to capture points, thoughts, and tensions. Use your notes to develop questions and illuminate connections.
- Interject only as needed to clarify statements, move the conversation forward or deeper, diffuse tension, and ensure all voices are heard.
- Keep an eye on time and know when to start winding down the conversation so there is sufficient time to reflect individually and as a group.

Coach Your Students

This can require the most energy during the discussion. The next page has tips on managing a few specific instances that might come up in your classroom.

TIPS YOU CAN USE WHEN STUDENTS:

Don't stick to the class norms

- Keep the class norms posted where all participants can see them and read them out loud. Students will often moderate each other by reminding everyone of the rules.
- Take a five-minute break. During this time, invite a rule-breaking student to be a co-facilitator and talk with them about what it means to moderate the conversation. Putting a student in a new role may help them see the conversation differently.

Dominate the conversation

- Ask the student to pause and invite others to react to what has been said.
- Give a general reminder that the goal is to hear all voices and a range of discussion, meaning the floor must be shared.

Choose to not participate

- Be proactive! Start by going around the room or table and having each student say something. Simply saying a few words out loud in front of a group can release a bit of the pressure a student might be feeling and make it easier for them to speak later on.
- During the discussion, let the student know that you are going to ask for their thoughts after the next few people talk. This lets them know that they will have to speak and gives them time to either check back into the conversation or prepare what they want to say.
- Explain that part of the learning experience of this activity is to understand that even if someone opts out, they are still making a conscious choice to participate or not—which is a key concept of democracy.
- If a student chooses to not participate, ask them to explain their choice to “sit this one out.” Or, invite a student to join the teacher as a co-facilitator.

Struggle to explain their thoughts

- Encourage students to think of an example that could illustrate what they are thinking.
- Pause the activity for a ten-minute research break. During this time, students can grab a textbook or access the internet to pull together evidence that might help them make their case.

Are ready to find common ground or reflect

- As the conversation or available time begins to wind down, encourage your students to reflect on what they learned about themselves as members of their community and democracy, and the role discussion plays in making wise decisions about public issues.
- Ask students to share their thoughts on why discussion is an important part of a thriving democracy. Identify where students' ideas overlap. In other words, where do they share common ground?