

Author

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Name of Unit

Governor Ralph L. Carr: A Voice Against the Tyranny of the Majority

Suggested Grade Level(s)

Secondary

Suggested Subject Area(s)

U.S. History; Integrated U.S. History and Language Arts courses; U.S. Government, Civics, and Current Events classes; Advanced Placement U.S. History; Advanced Placement English Language and Composition



Ralph L. Carr, Governor of Colorado (1939–1943)

Courtesy of the Colorado State Archives and Public Records

Unit Map

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Governor Ralph L. Carr: A Voice Against the Tyranny of the Majority

Suggested Grade Level(s)

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Suggested Subject Area(s)

- U.S. History: Adding an aspect of the home front experience which is often neglected in textbooks
- Integrated U.S. History and Language Arts courses: Use of primary sources such as letters, speeches, and artwork to explore the effects of the experience on individuals
- Government, Civics, and Current Events classes/activities: An examination of the balance between human emotion and the Constitution in times of danger
- Advanced Placement U.S. History or Government: Use of primary documents to evaluate the actions of government in times of danger
- Advanced Placement English Language and Composition: Use of primary sources such as letters, speeches, and artwork to explore the effects of the experience on individuals

Number of Class Periods Required

6 to 11 class periods (50 minutes per period)

Overarching Understanding

- Building and preserving American democracy demands attention to the threats to individuals and minority groups created by the so-called tyranny of the majority.

Essential Question(s)

- How do societies striving for equality come to terms with the tension between the good of the one and the good of the many?
- How is the balance between the one and the many influenced by visual language?

Guiding Question(s)

Lesson 1: The Incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II

- How can the balance between safety and liberty be maintained in times of threat to the State?

Lesson 2: Governor Ralph L. Carr: A Voice for the Minority

- How and why did Colorado Governor Ralph L. Carr attempt to maintain a balance between the safety of the nation and the liberty of Japanese Americans in Colorado during World War II?

Lesson 3: The Tyranny of the Majority

- In a democracy, what is the responsibility of the individual and of elected officials toward minority opinions?

Lesson 4: Document-Based Question

- What role does visual language play in creating and/or supporting the power of the majority over the minority?

Teacher Overview

Because this unit is intended to investigate certain problems that arise within American democracy, the first lesson has been written to ensure that students have background knowledge about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. The use of a standard history text to provide the background information is recommended. The bias of the text is irrelevant: an accurate account of the experience is preferred, but if a biased or incomplete account is given, that deficiency becomes a good talking point in the context of this unit.

When our country was faced with the attack on Pearl Harbor, a kind of Constitutional crisis—most evident in retrospect—was precipitated. It seemed that the safety of the nation was dependent on the abrogation of the rights of certain “suspect races.” While there were in reality three such “suspect races”—Germans, Italians, and Japanese—only one group of people was singled out: namely, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast.

In this unit students will examine the actions of several citizens presented with the choice between controlling a perceived risk and wielding power in accordance with the limits imposed by the Constitution. Some of those citizens were in positions of political power, others were powerful in the media, and others were “ordinary” citizens. (A question might be raised: Are there “ordinary” citizens in a democracy?)

This unit is intended to provide a deeper examination of the philosophies underpinning American democracy; help her/him explore the dangers inherent in the form; and encourage the development of a personal philosophy as a citizen in a democracy regarding responsibility toward minority populations whether identified by ideology, age, gender, or race. Depending on the curriculum of the implementing school, this unit might stand alone in an American History syllabus or be embedded in any humanities course.

Note about the Colorado Model Content Standards

This unit cites the 2008 Colorado Model Content Standards. Updated standards will be available in Fall 2009 and were not available at the time of printing.