



Lesson Plan

A Seat at the Table

This collaborative art project was inspired by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm’s story and considers the importance of diverse representation in public discourse. This lesson plan is designed to help you facilitate the design and creation of your class’s chairs - your “seats at the table” of representative democracy.

“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”

– Shirley Chisholm

**EDWARD M.
KENNEDY
INSTITUTE**

Day 1

Time	Activity	Description
[15 minutes]	Warm up: Who was Shirley Chisholm?	<p>Write the quote, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair,” on the whiteboard.</p> <p>Engage students in a discussion of the quote and the metaphor. What do the table and chairs represent? Who do they imagine said this quote, and when? What does the quote make them think of today?</p> <p>Use the “Resources” pages in this lesson plan about Shirley Chisholm to tell her story. She was a person of many firsts: the first black Congresswoman, the first black person to run for president, and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. When Shirley Chisholm was asked how she’d like to be remembered, she said, “I’d like them to say that Shirley Chisholm had guts.” Let the students know that during this lesson and project we’ll start to understand a little more about Shirley Chisholm’s courage, her willingness to take a stand, and the example she set for future generations.</p> <p>Introduce students to the A Seat at the Table Project and explain the final goal: the design and creation of a seat or some object that represents their identities, challenges to the status quo, and hopes for the future.</p>

Extension

<https://cnu.libguides.com/notableamericanwomen/chisholmshirley>

Share with students the video of Chisholm’s declaration of a presidential bid on January 25, 1972.

- What were Chisholm’s main campaign messages?
- What quotes from her speech stand out to you?
- What did Chisholm’s campaign symbolize?

Time

Activity

Description

[25 minutes]

***Read and annotate:
Learn about Shirley
Chisholm***

Materials

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35057641> or other article found in the Resources section

Shirley Chisholm Worksheet

On the board, write three words: “Identity,” “Challenge,” and “Vision.” Explain the meaning of each of the three words and distribute the Shirley Chisholm worksheet.

Pass out the BBC News Magazine article, “Before Hillary Clinton, there was Shirley Chisholm.” Direct students to read the article and underline and mark examples of each of the three concepts on the board. Alternative articles at varied reading levels can be found in the appendix. Once students finish reading, lead a class discussion and encourage students to add to their note-taking sheets.

- What experiences and values make up Shirley Chisholm’s identity?
- How did she challenge the status quo and what challenges did she experience as she took her seat at the table?
- What was her vision for the future and what did she work on to make that vision a reality?

[20 minutes]

Sketch Shirley’s chair

In partners or small groups, direct students to page 2 of the Shirley Chisholm worksheet. Encourage them to sketch a visual representation of what they’ve learned in class today about Shirley Chisholm. After a few minutes of thinking and sketching, have each group share their ideas with the class.

[10 minutes]

Preview

Let the students know that in the next two class periods, they’ll be thinking about their own identities and creating a visual representation of their own seat at the table. They may want to consider objects or supplies that they could bring from home to add to their seat.

Day 2

Time	Activity	Description
[15 minutes]	Warm up: Identity	<p>As students arrive in class, distribute sticky notes and ask students to think about and write down words that describe their identity. They may wish to add their identity sticky notes to the board or keep them private. Have some examples on the board already: “son,” “Beyoncé Fan,” “Trombone-player,” “math geek,” “Korean-American,” “immigrant,” “reader,” “artist,” etc. Encourage students to consider not only their outward-facing identities or labels that society gives them, but also their inner identities, born of their experiences, hopes, and accomplishments.</p> <p>After a few minutes, begin a short discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What objects, pictures or colors may be used to represent these identities? Give some examples from the board and ask students to share their ideas.
	Materials Sticky notes	
[20 minutes]	Discussion	<p>Facilitate a large or small group discussion to kick off the seat creation process. You may have students discuss in small groups and report their thinking or discuss as a large group. It may be helpful to track the discussion on the whiteboard under major themes, like “Power,” “Identity,” “Representation,” and “Our Seats.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When Shirley Chisholm refers to “the table” in her quote, she’s talking about places where important conversations are being held and people in positions of power. What “tables,” or places where decisions are made, can you think of? Which do you want to be part of?• Who currently has the power in these spaces? Do they represent the communities they serve?• Who had an original seat at the table when our country was founded? How is the table changing? What are some modern day examples of citizens bringing folding chairs to the table?• Think about your own identity. What experiences have influenced your perspective? What does the subject stand for? What changes does the subject want to see in the world?• Is your seat indeed a folding chair- light, portable, and an addition to the original design? Does it take another form?
	Extension or Addition Assign each group a historical or contemporary figure to represent in a seat.	

Time

Activity

Description

[15 minutes]

Plan your chair

Materials

My Seat at the Table Worksheet

Alternative Projects

Use the Seat at the Table Poster Template or an 11x17 piece of paper and have each student create a 2D drawing, painting, or collage to convey their vision of their seat at the table. Use the provided template to design and fold 3-D paper seats at the table for a miniature version of the project.

Divide students into smaller groups to begin to design and plan their seats. It may be helpful to give some students choice of their own design groups, as their seats will represent the groups' identity. Some students may wish to design their own seat. Or, the class may come up with a class concept for a seat. Give students an idea of how they might interpret their story and select imagery by using an example of a public figure, or a fictional character, such as the following:

- **Public Figure** Ruby Bridges was a courageous young student in New Orleans who figured prominently in the desegregation of schools, even in the face of angry protest. Her seat might look like one you'd find in a classroom. It might include images of her parents and teacher who supported her. It might have something around it that represents the angry protests at her school. It might be covered with messages about education and inclusion, work Bridges still focuses on today.
- **Fictional Character** Katniss Everdeen from "The Hunger Games" might have a seat made of coal, to represent her home in District 12, the coal-mining district. Maybe her seat would have a bow and arrow to represent her skill at hunting and archery, a lock of her sister's hair, or some paper flames to represent "The Girl on Fire."

Distribute the My Seat at the Table planning worksheet and instruct students to sketch out their ideas for their own seats. Once they finish the worksheet, check in with groups and individual students to provide ideas and guidance. Encourage students to make a list of supplies that they might bring from home to create their chair. Here is a sample supply list:

- Magazines
- Ribbon
- Stickers
- Fabric
- Stencils
- Photographs
- Duct Tape
- Quotes from stories, poems, songs, or speeches

Day 3

Time	Activity	Description
[Full period]	<i>Chair creation</i>	<p>Give students the opportunity to review their worksheets from yesterday and remember their plans for their seat. In small groups or individually, students will begin the creation process.</p> <p>Some examples of Shirley Chisholm media to play in the background as students are working:</p> <p><u>Shirley Chisholm's Presidential Campaign Announcement</u> <u>NPR's The First Black Woman to Run For President</u> <u>Shirley Chisholm: The Politics of Principle</u> <u>The Visionary Project's Shirley Chisholm Interviews</u></p> <p>If students finish early, distribute the Artist's Statement worksheet for them to capture the thought process behind their chairs.</p>

Materials

Supplies from home

Artists Statement Worksheet

What's Next?

Explore Other Seats

See how other groups and artists interpreted this project by learning more about the Seat at the Table exhibit at the Kennedy Institute. The exhibit opened at the Kennedy Institute in Fall 2018 and shared stories of people from diverse communities who exemplify Shirley's leadership, courage and work on behalf of others. Learn more at <https://www.emkinstitute.org/explore-the-institute/dynamic-educational-experiences/senator-in-training/seat-at-the-table>.

Create Your Own Exhibit

Student-created seats make a powerful statement together. Find a public space to mount and display your own community Seat at the Table exhibit, such as a space in your school, a public library or a museum. Engage with your surrounding community to continue the conversation about representation and inclusion. Reach out to seatatthetable@emkinstitute.org for more information and resources.

Plan a Visit to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute

The Kennedy Institute welcomes school groups of all ages to learn about democracy through a range of interactive educational programs. To learn more and plan a field trip for your school, visit <https://www.emkinstitute.org/explore-the-institute/dynamic-educational-experiences>.

Appendix

Vaidyanathan, R. (2016, January). Before Hillary Clinton, there was Shirley Chisholm. BBC News Magazine. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35057641>

Kazmi, L and Hegg, S. (2016, September). What former presidential candidate Shirley Chisholm said about facing gender discrimination. PBS News Hour, KCTS 9 Member Station. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/what-former-presidentialcandidate-shirley-chisholm-said-about-facing-gender-discrimination>

Jones, L.B. (2005, February). Unbought & Unbossed: Lesson Plan: Shirley Chisholm for President. PBS. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/pov/chisholm/lesson-plan/>

(2005). Shirley Chisholm: Unbought, Unbossed, and Unforgotten. Anti-Defamation League, A World of Difference Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/media/6661/download>

Shirley Chisholm Speech at Howard University. American Public Media. Retrieved from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/schisholm-2.html>

Standards Alignment

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

- **Grades 3-5 Literacy Standards for History and Social Science**
Reading Standards for Literacy: Key Ideas and Details, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading, and Level of Text Complexity
- **Grade 5 Content Standards**
Topic 5. Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all.
- **Grade 8 Content Standards**
Topic 4. Rights and responsibilities of citizens.
Option for student-led Civics Project as described in Grade 8 standards.
- **United States History I Content Standards**
Topic 5. The Civil War and Reconstruction: causes and consequences.
- **United States History II Content Standards**
Topic 4. Defending Democracy: The Cold War and Civil Rights at Home

21st Century Skills (www.p21.org)

- Use a wide range of idea creation techniques
- Create new and worthwhile ideas
- Elaborate, refine, analyze, and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts
- Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work and understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas
- Participating effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes
- Understanding the local and global impact of civic decisions
- Exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts

Resources

A Seat at the Table

Name _____

Worksheet: Shirley's Chair

Use this page to take notes on Shirley Chisholm's qualities as you complete assigned readings and participate in class discussions.



IDENTITY

"I am not the candidate of black America, though I am black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women's movement of this country, although I am a woman and equally proud of that. I am the candidate of the people of America."

CHALLENGE

"I ran for President, despite hopeless odds, to demonstrate the sheer will and refusal to accept the status quo."

VISION

"You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas."

Name _____

Worksheet: Shirley's Chair

Create a visual representation of Shirley Chisholm's seat at the table. Use the guiding questions to consider elements that you'd like to add to her chair.

What messages should Shirley's chair represent?

What words or phrases could be added?

Should the chair be comfortable or uncomfortable?

What surrounds Shirley's chair?

What colors will the chair be?

Who else might be represented as part of Shirley's story?

What objects or photos could be attached?



Write a few sentences about the choices you made as you planned Shirley's chair.

Resource: Who Was Shirley Chisholm?

1924

Born in Brooklyn, to New York parents who were Caribbean immigrants

1953

Earned multiple degrees in education, and became a nursery school director and education policy consultant

1965

Elected to New York State legislature

1968

Elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, representing New York

1972

Lost the primary, but won 10% of the Democratic Primary vote, a strong showing for her under-resourced campaign

1972

Announced her campaign for President of the United States

1971

Co-founded the National Women's Political Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus

1968

Became an outspoken advocate for women, children, immigrants, people of color and people with low income

1972-1983

Continued to serve in Congress in leadership roles and retired in 1983

1983

Taught at Mount Holyoke College and co-founded the National Political Caucus of Black Women

Famous Firsts

- First black woman to serve in Congress
- First black major-party candidate
- First woman ever to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination



Resource: What is Shirley Chisholm's legacy?

Though notable for her famous firsts, Shirley Chisholm's greatest contribution was the work she did on behalf of others. Over the course of her 14 years in Congress, Chisholm was a force for change and a champion of legislation that would improve the quality of life for women, children, people of color, and the poor. She fought for the people around her and the issues that mattered to them—for domestic workers like her mother; for immigrants like her parents who had come to New York from the Caribbean; for children like those she had worked with as a childcare provider. Having her voice in Congress—at the table where important debates happen, and policy is decided—meant that more and different people were represented. She stepped up, claimed her seat at the table of public discourse, and made a difference.



Name _____

Worksheet: Planning

Your **Seat** Is Your Identity & What You Care About
The **Table** Is Where Decisions Are Made
Bring Your Seat to the Table

Questions to think about

- How can you represent your identity using your seat?
- What colors will the seat be?
- What message should your seat represent?
- Should the seat be comfortable or uncomfortable?
- What objects, photos or other supplies could be attached to your seat?
- What words (if any) should be represented on the seat?
- Why is it important for your seat to be at the table?

Supply List

What objects or supplies do you need to create your seat?

What can you bring from home?

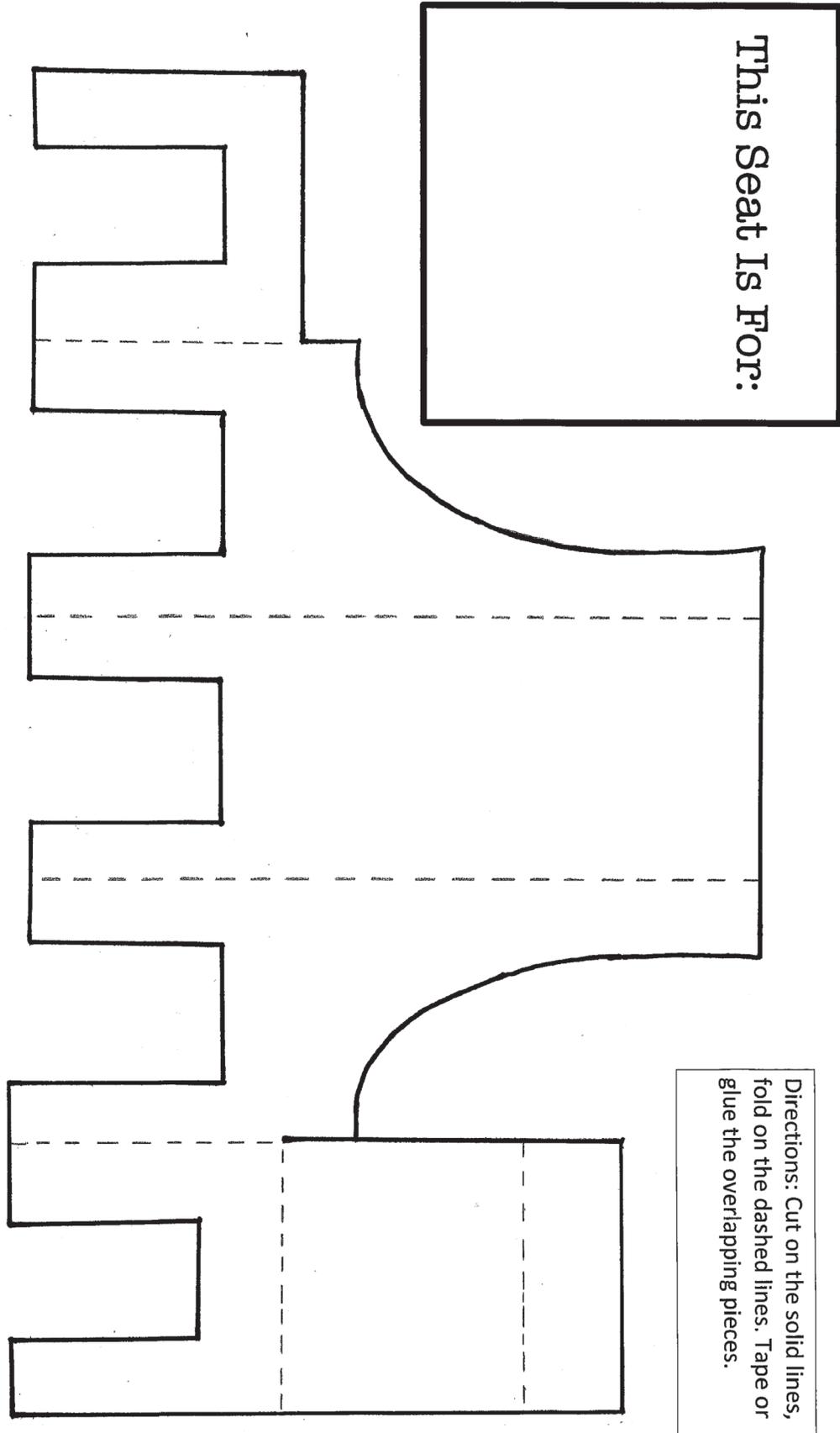
Worksheet: My Seat at the Table



_____’s Seat at the Table

Design a seat that represents you at the table.

Worksheet: My Seat at the Table



Chair Design Template from:
<https://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/kidscraftsactivityblog/2011/11/how-to-make-a-paper-doll-house-table-chairs/>

Name _____

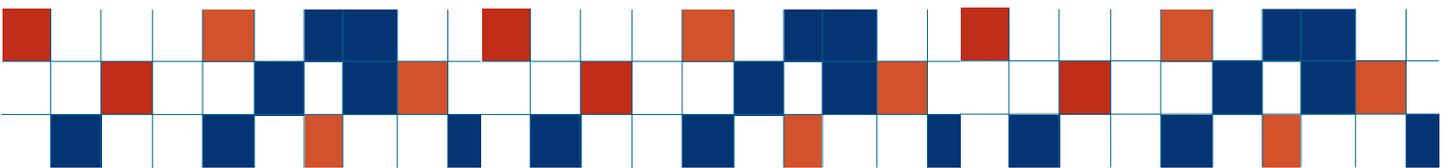
Worksheet: Artist's Statement

Name

School

Grade level

Describe your chair in the space below. What does it say about your identity? What do you want people to understand about your vision for the future? Why is it important that you bring your seat to the table?



The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate is dedicated to educating the public about the important role of the Senate in our government, encouraging participatory democracy, invigorating civil discourse, and inspiring the next generation of citizens and leaders to engage in the civic life of their communities.



emkinstitute.org

Columbia Point • Boston, MA

EDWARD M. KENNEDY INSTITUTE
FOR THE UNITED STATES SENATE