

Thinking like a Change Maker

Purpose

This framework helps students explore the [Activist Dimension of historical thinking](#) by examining how individuals and groups organized and mobilized to create social change. Activism has deep roots in American history, beginning with Patriots like Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty, who organized protests, boycotts, and public actions in defense of colonial rights.

Activism is a tradition that has shaped American democracy, whether in struggles for independence, abolition, labor rights, or civil rights.

By examining social movements such as the Patriot Movement of the 1770s, the Abolition Movement, labor organizing during the Gilded Age (such as the Knights of Labor and the Pullman Strike), the Selma March, the Black Panther School Breakfast Program, and Black Lives Matter, students analyze how activists built movements, raised public awareness, confronted obstacles, and made lasting impacts. This work encourages students to think critically about the methods used to pursue justice and consider how activism remains central to addressing today's social issues.

Student Task

As we study various social movements, analyze how activists promoted change by addressing the following questions:

1. What were the movement's goals, and how did they challenge societal norms at the time?
2. How did the movement educate the public about the issues?
3. What methods were used to raise awareness and gain support?
4. What challenges did they face, and how were those challenges addressed?
5. What was the impact of the movement, and what is its ongoing legacy?

The Activist Dimension: *How can history help us work towards equity and justice?*

Guidepost 1	It is important to understand why a particular historical event being studied, and how it relates to a modern day problem that needs to be exposed.
Guidepost 2	Historical events should be contextualized in order to understand the oppressive action underlying them.
Guidepost 3	The experiences of historical actors in the event being studied are important to understanding the underlying oppressive action. Furthermore, examples of agency and resistance by oppressed groups should be emphasized and are vital to building critical hope.
Guidepost 4	History does not always provide answers to modern day problems, but it can inspire informed action if the successes and shortcomings of social movements and legislation are analyzed.
Guidepost 5	History is a means to establish deeper connections between the past and present. This extends beyond simply understanding modern-day issues. This deeper connection asks us to be reflective about the world, our community, and ourselves so that we are working towards a more just and equitable society.

Inquiry Question:

Movement:

Stage of Activism	Response	Evidence from Text
<p>Conceptualizing Change <i>What was the movement's vision for societal change, and how was it different from the lived reality of the time?</i></p>		
<p>Raising Awareness <i>Did the movement help to educate the public about the type of oppression and how they could work against it?</i></p> <p><i>Did the social movement explain how its vision for change would benefit all?</i></p>		
<p>Taking Action <i>What methods were used to raise public awareness?</i></p> <p><i>Was there a trigger event that gained public attention?</i></p> <p><i>Were solidarity efforts part of the actions taken?</i></p>		

Reflection

Did the movement gain support?

Did the group's collective actions lead to a change in society?

Is there still a legacy of this today?