

Teaching About the Violence at the Capitol on January 6, 2021

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Introduction

Once again we are being tested as educators by events that have transpired within society that are out of our immediate control. As you begin to think about supporting your students, I ask that you remember to consider your own thoughts and feelings and take advantage of the resources that are available to you within the district.

When thinking about the support your students may need, the following resources have been curated by **Sara Burd, Denny Conklin, Crystal Power and Laura Rodriguez**. Hopefully, the selected resources will help facilitate discussions that may arise as students attempt to process the most recent events that have transpired in our nation's capital. Despite what their dispositions may be, I have full faith and confidence in your abilities as educators to respond appropriately to ensure their emotional, physical and psychological safety. If you need additional resources or assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Rod

*"Education is the Key to Unlock
The Golden Door of Freedom."*

George Washington Carver

Tips for Setting the Stage for these Conversations

1) Listen to your students: Some classes and students might want to talk about the topic a lot, others might just want to ask questions, others might shy away from the topic because it makes them feel

uncomfortable or because they feel like they do not fully understand what is going on. The best thing we can do for students is let them know we are hearing them.

2) Be honest and transparent: It is okay to tell your students how the events have made you feel and how they are impacting you. You may wish to use the [Mood Meter](#) as a warm welcome for students to place themselves as well.

3) Allow students time for their own reflection and to work through their own thoughts. One strategy for this is through [journaling](#). Other strategies to scaffold conversation include: "[Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn](#)", participating in a [fishbowl](#) discussion, or visually representing their thoughts using a [graffiti board](#). Students could also do a modified version of the "[color-symbol-image](#)" strategy, stating a color that describes how they are currently feeling and then could draw a picture/symbol to represent their reaction to the events at the capitol. Students might also want to utilize Padlet or Jamboard to begin to get their thoughts together.

4) When wrapping up a conversation, try to take a 'dipstick' of where students are at and what they might be feeling. Try to end the conversation so that students are in a safe, secure place (at the secondary level, there is often a difference between 'safe' vs. 'comfortable' as some cognitive dissonance can be beneficial if the topic is followed up with the next class).

5) Be mindful about the images or video you use in class, keeping in mind ways that they could reinforce trauma for some students (ex- a student immigrated from another country where there was violence, voting was jeopardized with intimidation tactics and threats).

6) Difficult conversations are always made easier with well established classroom norms. This is a good time to go over community agreements about how you have difficult discussions in class. Specific norms can be set for the way that students ask questions, participate in a class discussion, etc. For example, not all students know how to agree/disagree respectfully. Here are some great sentence stems:

- I understand what you are saying about _____ and _____
- I agree with you because _____
- I disagree with you because _____
- I am having trouble understanding your perspective, can you say it again?
- Can you say more about that?

In establishing norms, it might also be helpful for students to know the limits of conversation and what the 'non-negotiables' will be. For example, using racial slurs or praising violence are two things that are off the table in conversation. Ultimately it is up to each school and teacher to decide where these boundaries lie.

7) Anticipate vocabulary that might come up in student questions or discussions and know how you would explain them at an age-appropriate level:

Tier 1: protest, march, rights, discrimination, heritage, identity, rally, unite, hate, violence, breach, guns, election, various political positions (President, VP, Representative, Senator, Mayor, Governor, etc) police officers, Capital Police, vandalism

Tier 2: race, racism, bigotry, upstander, monument, counterprotest, nationalism, condemn, disavow, free speech, hate group, religion, fraudulent, National Guard, State Police, disenfranchised

Tier 3: Neo-Nazi, Confederate, white supremacy, KKK, left, right, alt-right, Trump, Proud Boys, AntiFa, MAGA

You can also offer students some vocabulary to use in [describing human behavior and the choices that people make](#):

- Perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, upstander, ally

8) The events at the Capital also provide an opportunity to visit/revisit some important skills with students:

- Fact vs. opinions, fact checking
- How to be an objective reader
- Sourcing (upper grades): what is the difference between an article and an op-ed/opinion piece? Where does my information come from and how does this affect its perspective/reliability?
- Why is history important to study?
- Perpetrators, bystanders, upstanders, allies

9) Finally, it is worth noting a few things to students:

- What happened today is not normal--the U.S. has always had a peaceful transition of power between presidents
- There has not been this type of attack or invasion at the U.S. capitol since the War of 1812
- There are very clear racial overtones to the riots today:
 - inclusion of members from hate groups like the Proud Boys, people carrying Confederate flags
 - The U.S. history of BIPOC police brutality (history of the police being created from slave patrols) vs. the way rioters were treated today
 - Contrast between Black Lives Matters protests from this summer and the violent acts today
- There is nothing justifiable about the mob violence that broke out today--it is not a time for us to "see the other perspective"
 - You can give examples of adamant Trump supporters who were objecting to certifying the electoral votes today who changed their tune/statements after the events (big example: Mitch McConnell)
 - Give examples of prominent Republican leaders who released statements early condemning the violence: George W. Bush, Mitt Romney

Elementary Teaching Ideas

Make use of the morning meeting times and established community spaces where social emotional learning and community connections are made regularly. Is there a connection that can be drawn to Responsive Classroom values, the school pledge or a Second Step lesson? (Relevant Second step lessons: unit 2 empathy, similarities and differences, unit 3 managing worry, strong feelings).

Resources for Teachers and Families:

SEL

- [Resources for Teachers on the Days After the Attack on the U.S. Capitol](#)
 - Great compilation of resources and ideas for teaching.
 - Teachers, you may wish to examine the guidance, specifically thinking about your own identity, and the identity of your students.
- [Caring for Students in the Wake of a Traumatic News Event](#)
- [When Bad Things are Happening](#) from Teaching Tolerance
 - Provides guidance around facilitating difficult conversations; geared towards educators
- [Creating Safe Civic Spaces in Troubling Times](#) from Modern Civics Project
 - While written after Parkland, the author shares some guidance and resources for educators.
- [Helping Kids Navigate Scary News Stories](#) from PBS
- [Talking to Children about Tragedies and Other News Events](#) from healthykids.org
- [How to Talk to Your Kids about the Pro-Trump Mob](#) from the Houston Chronicle
 - Offers some tips for families about keeping routines, reflecting on your own family values
- [How to Talk to Your Kids about the Breach at the U.S. Capitol](#) from Motherly
 - Offers some beneficial guidance around facilitating conversations that is geared towards families, but will also be very helpful for elementary teachers.
- [How to Talk to Your Kids About the Violence at the U.S. Capitol](#) (Denver Post)
- [How to Talk Honestly to Kids about Racism](#)
- [What white children need to understand about race](#)
- [Resources to discuss race, racism, police violence with children](#)
- [Teaching in Disturbing Times \(opinion piece for teachers\)](#)
- [Resources for educators on anti-racist teaching](#)
- [Helping Children deal with tragedy](#)
- [Fighting Racism in Schools \(Webinar/Quotes\)](#)
- [SEL & Equity](#)
- [Post-election resources](#)

- Covers a wide variety of topics for teaching about events after an election
- [FAQ on Presidential Transitions](#)
- [Family Table Talk about Voting and Elections from the ADL](#)

Facilitating Elementary Discussions

- Remember that our primary focus with elementary students is to reassure that they are **safe**. They may or may not have strong feelings about what is currently happening, and may showcase those feelings in a variety of ways. Always keep in mind that they may speak with their behavior- listen carefully.
- When discussing initially with your students, try to listen more than you speak. Let your students' concerns guide the moment.
- Don't assume that because of their age they have not heard or seen something.
- Begin with questions:
 - What have you heard?
 - What questions do you have?
- Offer basic information rooted in facts:
 - K-2 (possibly 3):
 - Every four years, adults vote for who they want to be the next President of the US. Adults have some different opinions and some similar opinions, like you all do. People who run for president who lose do their best to show good sportsmanship. Some supporters of President Trump went to Washington DC to protest Trump not winning the votes to be president. (for third grade this might be a little too toned down, teachers use your discretion at which explanation might be more beneficial).
 - 3-5
 - Every four years, adults cast their votes for who they want to be the next president. Adults can vote for many things - their governors, presidents, mayors, and more. President Trump did not get as many votes in November as To-be President Biden. Yesterday, Trump supporters protested in Washington DC so our government could not certify or officiate President Biden because they do not believe Biden won the election.
- Reassure students that they are safe, and that people, lawmakers, military, police, are doing their jobs to keep people safe and to maintain order.
 - President-elect Biden's words around this being a small number of people may offer reassurance to even the youngest of students.

Here is some guidance from [How to Talk to Your Kids about the Breach at the U.S. Capitol](#)

- "PEARLS" Acronym for facilitating:
 - P: Prepare

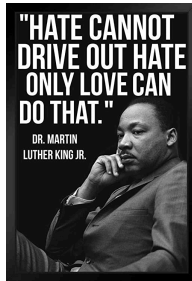
- Before discussing the events at the Capitol, decide what you think they need to know and plan out how you're going to explain it at an age-appropriate level. They don't need every detail.
 - See the general guidance for a list of terms that may come up so that you are prepared to explain them in an age-appropriate way.
- E: Explain
 - Keep things simple and on their level. Start with just a few sentences and see if that satisfies them.
 - Check for understanding- ask them to break down and explain what you had said.
- A: Answer
 - If you are asked the question more than once, try to use the same explanation each time.
- R: Reassure
 - Reassure them that the grownups are doing their best to keep them safe.
 - Don't make guarantees, but remind them that there are more good people in the world than bad.
 - (Consider adding in some words from President-elect Biden: "Let me be very clear. The scenes of chaos at the Capitol do not reflect a true America, do not represent who we are. What we're seeing are a small number of extremist, dedicated to lawlessness. This is not dissent, it's disorder. It's chaos. It borders on sedition. And it must end, now.")
- L: Listen
 - Just let them talk. The things they keep repeating are the issues they're confused about and that you can clarify later. Be mindful of the areas they're avoiding too, because maybe you need to fill in an important detail they've totally missed.
 - In the classroom, while it's important to listen, if a child begins sharing information that may be more advanced, graphic, or disturbing to others, ask them to hold their thoughts so you can better understand them in a private conversation. It is okay to correct misinformation.
- S: Safeguard
 - Take a moment to talk about all the things grownups are doing to prevent more things like this from happening. Remind them of who is around to protect them.
 - We can't guarantee that things will always end peacefully, but we can guarantee that we'll be there to listen and protect them.

Activity Ideas

Grades K-3

- Allow some time to process if you have a class discussion. Put on some calming music, allowing time to draw, write, or reflect. You could use this time to speak with students one-on-one to follow-up after a class discussion.
- Consider exploring President-elect Biden's words: "America is so much better than what we are seeing today."

- Events yesterday reflect only a very small group of people, who wanted to make people scared. What makes America good? Who are the helpers in the world that make it safe? What kindness can you spread?
- Consider using the [Big Paper Conversation](#) (or Padlet!)
- Here's slides of the text [What Does it Mean to be American?](#)
 - You don't have to read the whole book, but it might be useful to circle back to civic values, specifically examining why Biden would say these words.
- Consider examining quote from Martin Luther King Jr



- Discuss the quote:
 - What does Dr. King mean by this?
 - Based on some of what we have seen and heard,
- how can we- even as young students- take steps to make the world a better place.
- Consider using the [Big Paper Conversation](#) (or Padlet!)
- Use a read aloud, such as [What Does it Mean to be Kind](#)
- Generate ideas about how they can spread kindness and not hate or violence
- Read Aloud "[The Breaking News](#)" (YouTube read aloud; not a district-approved resource, so do not share direct link. This should only be used in synchronous lessons with teacher presenting.)

Grades 4-5

- Explore this quote from Bayard Rustin: "If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society. If we desire a society that is democratic, then democracy must become a means as well as an end."
 - You may need to revisit the concept of democracy and provide some definitions.
 - Consider asking students to free-write: how do the actions at the Capitol Building go against what Rustin has said here.
 - Consider using the [Big Paper Conversation](#) (or Padlet!)
- iCivics infographic on the [Peaceful Transfer of Power](#)
 - May be beneficial in explaining why adults are upset
 - Good quote from Al Gore from the 2000 election
 - Watch [One Last Time](#) and reflect on the position of our first president's decision to step away from the presidency in order to allow for others to serve.
- [Text of Biden's speech](#) regarding the Capitol Insurrection
- Here's an [article from the Smithsonian institute](#) about the transition of power between Adams

and Jefferson. It's too advanced for elementary, but could provide some interesting background information for you.

- [Peaceful Transitions](#) collection from the Bill of Rights institute.
 - Collection of images from Vox if you wish to do some
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Secondary Teaching Ideas:

Make use of the homeroom, ASPIRE and advisory times and established community spaces where social emotional learning and community connections are made regularly. Is there a connection that can be drawn to Responsive Classroom values, the school values or Collaborative Problem Solving agreements?

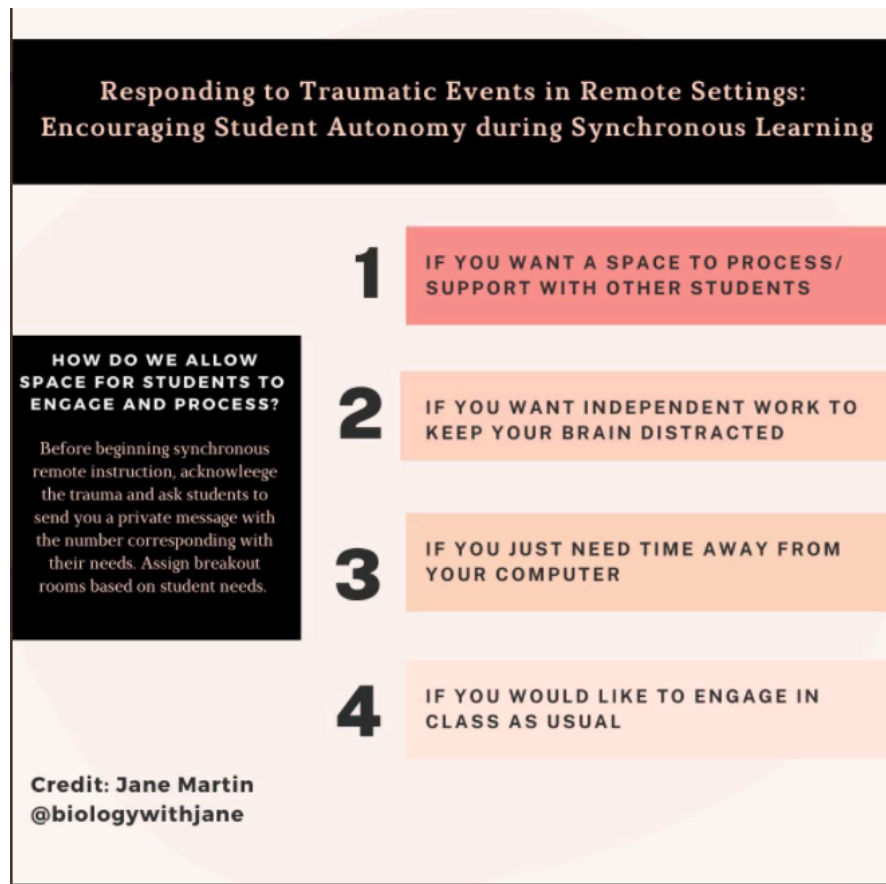
- Some good tools: using journaling, Jamboard, or Padlet to establish space for reflection and students to get out their thoughts
- What words or phrases have you heard to describe what happened at the capitol yesterday?
 - Take some time to define and distinguish words like protest, coup, insurrection, riot, mob, sedition,
- The events from yesterday at the capitol made me feel _____ because _____
- Reflection on quotes:
 - "Democracy is becoming rather than being. Its essence is eternal struggle." -Judge William Hastie
 - "[W]e must remember that we cannot hope to achieve democracy and equality in such a way that would destroy the very kind of society which we hope to build. If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society. If we desire a society that is democratic, then democracy must become a means as well as an end. If we desire a society in which men are brothers, then we must act towards one another with brotherhood. If we can build such a society, then we would have achieved the ultimate goal of human freedom." -Bayard Rustin, 1969
- Discussion: What is the difference between protest and insurrection? Where should the limits be on our rights of free assembly and protest?
- Discussion: What are the things that make our democracy strong? What are the things that can threaten our democracy? Where do we go from here?
- You may have heard phrases like "white privilege" or "white supremacy" mentioned in relation to events at the capitol---how are these related to the riots and storming of the capitol?
- [ADL Blog](#) on the events.
- Have students reflect on what they have seen in their social media accounts related to the day's events and what impacts what appears in their feeds as well as how social media spreads information/misinformation
 - During the day's events on Jan 6, in what ways did social media provide valuable information? In what ways did it spread misinformation?
- Watch [One Last Time](#) and reflect on the position of our first president's decision to step away from the presidency in order to allow for others to serve.
- [Watch President-Elect Joe Biden's remarks](#) on the insurrection at the capitol

- Have students write down one phrase that resonates with them
- [iCivics- Peaceful Transition of Power infographic](#)
- [What's In Your News](#) slide activity.
- CNN 10 is planning on posting a video tomorrow morning
- Further Consideration (Mental Health, Stress and Psychology):
 - Dangers of herd mentality and how living in the midst of a pandemic has made us more vulnerable. [Read this article](#) and consider how perhaps the context of the past 10 months have set the stage for these events unlike any other time in history (maybe add in conjunction with social media and the availability of information)? *"Managing distressing emotions is a difficult task during this pandemic and it affects our ability to differentiate others views from our own...Today, potentially dangerous herd thinking is easily fueled through technology and mass communication. With our cell phones, tablets and other devices, we receive messages quickly and consistently, even if we may not ask for them. The latest crowd psychologies, polarizing political or social views reach us and may exaggerate fears. It's a numbers game for group psychology leaders, and we're all targets."*

SEL Considerations

- [What to expect from different ages](#) and how teachers can respond to create a trauma sensitive response/ healing centered response.
- [Multilingual Trauma Resources](#) for Families and Teachers
- [How to Support Students When There is Frightening News](#)
- Use a [Healing Centered Engagement](#) approach. Consider [these classroom strategies](#) and approaches for more in-depth learning.
- [What Teachers Can Do to Help Students](#)
 - Resume routine as much as possible. Children tend to function better when they know what to expect. Returning to a school routine will help students feel that the troubling events have not taken control over every aspect of their daily lives. Maintain expectations of students. It doesn't need to be 100%, but needing to do some home- work and simple classroom tasks is very helpful.
 - Be aware of signs that a child may need extra help. Students who are unable to function due to feelings of intense sadness, fear or anger should be referred to a mental health professional. Children may have distress that is manifested as physical ailments, such as head- aches, stomachaches, or extreme fatigue.
 - Help kids understand more about what happened. For example, you can mention the various kinds of help coming in, and provide positive coping ideas.
 - Reassure children that school officials continue to make sure they are safe. Children's fears abate when they know that trusted adults are doing what they can to take care of them.
 - Stay in touch with families. Tell them about the school's programs and activities so they can be prepared for discussions that may continue at home. Encourage parents to limit their children's exposure to news reports.

- Take care of yourself. You may be so busy helping your students that you neglect yourself. Find ways for you and your colleagues to support one another.



Adult Collective Care Considerations

In these moments it is vital that we take care of each other by fostering a sense of common purpose, building strong relationships, and reinforcing the social emotional skills we use to support each other and respond to challenges together. **The concept of collective care is inclusive of self-care practices but goes further by asking us to show proactive compassion for one another** - both on interpersonal and systemic levels.

- [Trauma Informed Self Care and Resilience Self-Assessment and Toolkit](#) for adults
- [Tip Sheet](#) to take care of yourself.
- [Pause Reset Nourish](#) to promote well-being.
- [Learning partnership bridge](#) - resource to link identities and mindsets (important for educators to reflect on how they are showing up to the classroom)
- [SEL Equity Pitfalls/solutions](#) to help foster safety and equity in the classroom
- [Race & Trauma in the classroom](#)

Resources, Strategies, and Best Practices

- Revisiting Setting Norms - Civic Norms
 - Harvard: [Thinking Routine](#)
- Specific Strategies
 - Facing History: [S.I.T \(Surprising, Interesting, Troubling\)](#)
 - Facing History: [Responding to the Election](#)
 - [Jamelle Bouie's piece in the 1619 Project](#) is a great resource on the historic context of disenfranchisement in the “illegitimacy” of the black vote / candidates of color