Practicing the First Amendment to Stand up for Just Causes
Primary Content Area: American Government/US History

Introduction
Perhaps the most important lesson we can teach students of the Constitution and American History is to become active participants in the issues their communities face. While students are required to understand the rights they have in order to graduate, we also want students to be empowered to practice them and know when their rights are being abused. Through this project, students will engage in activities to learn about the first amendment and the civil rights movement. While these two themes may fall at opposite ends of the school year chronologically, students will see the continuity of these themes through the project and cement an understanding of the relevance of first amendment rights. The students will thus see connections between the first amendment, the civil rights movement, and their own communities through practice of the first amendment through service-learning.

Project Goals
- Students will learn about the first amendment to the Constitution and the basic civil rights to protest and defend the rights enshrined in the Constitution.
- Students will learn how the Constitution is applicable in everyday life.
- Students will practice freedoms of the first amendment. Students will provide evidence of how these freedoms were used to preserve democracy.
- Students will reflect on the practice of their freedoms through their service experiences.

Procedures/Project Sequence
1. Students will be introduced to the first amendment in its original context. Through images and definitions, students will develop an understanding of the first amendment. Students will discuss complex applications of the first amendment. The teacher can provide scenarios such as: Is it legal for a newspaper to print defamatory claims about a president because it is politically opposed him? If the newspaper had evidence would it be permissible to print it? Can you yell that there is a bomb at a rock concert if it isn’t true? Why? What would be the limitations of the first amendment?
2. Discussion question for students: How was the first amendment relevant to the founding fathers? What concerned them as they developed the first amendment rights?
3. Journaling: How is the first amendment relevant to you? Have you ever experienced or witnessed a situation where freedoms of the amendment were threatened? Have you ever had an experience where you could have spoken up using the first amendment but you didn’t know it existed? Have you ever felt the first amendment didn’t apply to you because of your status (legal, socioeconomic, etc.)?
4. Students will receive a brief overview of the 1960’s movements. *See websites below for resources.
5. Examination of the African American Civil Rights Movement: Students will look at poems by Langston Hughes (see below) and King’s Letter from Birmingham to acquire an understanding of the struggles of African Americans and ways in which they used the first amendment to fight for their rights. Class will brainstorm together: What did African
Americans hope to achieve during the Civil Rights movement? What strategies did they use to attain their goals?

6. Case Study of Women’s Rights Movement: Students will look at The Problem that Had No Name and additional resources to discuss and understand the goals of the women’s movement. What strategies did women use to achieve their goals?

7. Case Study of the Chicano Movement: Students will read El Plan de Aztlan and other relevant sources and discuss and brainstorm the goals Chicanos worked toward as well as how they tried to accomplish their goals. How did these goals and strategies relate to the first amendment?

8. Case Study of Gay Rights Movement: Students will read Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square and other relevant materials. They will discuss the goals and strategies of the gay rights movement. What were the goals and strategies of the gay rights movement? How were first amendment rights relevant?

9. How have these groups used their first amendment rights to advocate for themselves and respond to the threats to their rights? Students will write an essay that uses these sources to explain how the movements of the 1960s connect to the first amendment.

10. Plan in groups or individually if they choose: What problems do you see in your community? How can you practice the first amendment to stand up for what you believe in? Students will select one or more first amendment rights to practice.

11. Throughout the year, as opportunities present themselves, students will practice first amendment rights and will document their participation, through photographs, reflective art works or other forms.

12. At the end of the year, when the 1960’s movements are more extensively studied, students will present to the class how they have practiced the First Amendment while working on issues in their community.

Community Partner Resources
Immigrant Youth Justice League - http://www.iyjl.org/
Center On Halsted - http://www.centeronhalsted.org/home.cfm
Rainbow Push Coalition - http://rainbowpush.org/

Resources
- The Problem that Had No Name, Betty Friedan
- The Wedding Within the War by Michael Rossman - http://www.mrossman.org/www/wwwindex.html
- I Too, American Sing, Langston Hughes - http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/15615
- Letter from Birmingham, Martin Luther King
Addendum
This project addresses the following Common Core Standards and Social Emotional Standards

CC.K-12.R.R.1 Key Ideas and Details: 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.
CC.K-12.W.R.7 Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
CC.K-12.SL.1 Comprehension and Collaboration: 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.
CC.K-12.SL.5 Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

1A.4a: Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behavior.
2A.4a: Analyze how similarities and differences between one’s own and others’ perspectives.
3B.4b: Apply decision-making skills to establish responsible social and work relationships.

Duration
Students should spend 14-22 hours on this project depending upon the amount of time spent on the book project. The suggested length for this project is 6-10 weeks.

Preparation: Classroom learning/Discussion/Research of problem – 6-8 hours
Action: Practice of 5 freedoms from First Amendment – 6-10 hours
Reflection: Writing/Discussion – 2-4 hours

Cross Curricular Connections
Connections with English and Art courses could be made during this project.