



FREDDIE GRAY & BALTIMORE UNREST: EXPLORING THE CASE USING OP-EDS

On April 12, 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25 year-old African American resident of Baltimore, MD, was arrested and injured while in police custody; he died a week later due to a severed spine. The city of Baltimore engaged in protests almost immediately and on the day of Freddie Gray's funeral, a part of the protest erupted into some violent incidents, including fires, looting and police officers being injured. Gray's death was ruled a homicide and on May 1, Baltimore State Attorney Marilyn Mosby announced that all six Baltimore police officers involved in the arrest of Freddie Gray were arrested and charged. Many attribute the speed with which the charges were filed to the high profile and media attention of the protests and the fact that Marilyn Mosby has articulated her commitment to accountability in cases such as these.

This lesson provides an opportunity for high school students to discuss the case of Freddie Gray's death and the protests that took place in Baltimore and elsewhere. In the lesson, students will learn more about the case, read and analyze several op-eds about it and use what they learned to write their own argumentative essays with a specific point of view and evidence to support their positions.

Grade Level: grades 9–12

Time: 45–50 minutes (and including a writing assignment for homework)

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn more about the death of Freddie Gray and the charges filed against the six Baltimore police officers.
- Students will reflect on several opinion essays with diverse perspectives on the situation in Baltimore.
- Students will write their own argumentative essays that espouse a particular point of view about the case with evidence to support their position.

Material:

- [Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer](#) (one for each student)
- *Five articles for small group discussion (depending on class size, about 6–10 copies each):*
 - “In Baltimore, We’re All Freddie Gray” (*The New York Times*, April 28, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/04/29/opinion/in-baltimore-were-all-freddie-gray.html?ref=opinion&r=1)
 - “Baltimore riots and the price of protest” (Fox News, April 28, 2015, www.foxnews.com/opinion/2015/04/28/price-protest.html)

- "To the People of Baltimore: Stop Making Things Worse" (*The National Review*, April 28, 2015, www.nationalreview.com/article/417618/people-baltimore-stop-making-things-worse-editors)
- "Violence in Baltimore" (*The New York Times*, April 29, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/opinion/charles-blow-violence-in-baltimore.html)
- "It's time to seriously rethink 'zero tolerance' policing" (*The Washington Post*, May 4, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-broken-approach/2015/05/04/5119f10c-f28c-11e4-b2f3-af5479e6bbdd_story.html)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Glossary of Education Terms](#).")

- condone
- disaffected
- disenfranchised
- editorial
- free speech
- incarceration
- indiscriminately
- looting
- nonviolence
- op-ed
- oppression
- protest
- riot
- uprisers
- viciously
- zero tolerance

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: *What have you heard about what is happening in Baltimore, MD? Have you heard the name Freddie Gray and if so, what do you know about him?*
2. Share aloud some of following background information for students about Freddie Gray's arrest, death and the protests that followed:
 - On April 12 in Baltimore, MD, Freddie Gray, a 25 year old African American man, reportedly made eye contact with a police officer who was on bike patrol. Gray ran from the police officer, was then chased by several police officers and was finally stopped and gave up without force, according to the police. Part of this interaction was recorded on a cellphone video and went viral on social media. The police found a knife on Freddie Gray they described as illegal but according to State Attorney Marilyn Mosby: "The knife was not a switchblade and is lawful under Maryland law."
 - When they arrived at the police station, a medic was reportedly called and Gray was taken to the hospital where he underwent double surgery on his spine. He remained in a coma for a week and on April 19, Freddie Gray was pronounced dead of a severed spine after suffering a spinal cord injury while in police custody. Several days later, city officials acknowledged that the police should have given Gray medical care instead of waiting more than forty minutes after his arrest.
 - Protests began and grew after Freddie Gray was pronounced dead. On April 20, Baltimore officials announced that the six police officers were suspended with pay. The U.S. Justice Department announced a federal investigation into Gray's death.
 - In the late afternoon and evening of April 27, the day of Freddie Gray's funeral, there were clashes between some protestors and police amid growing tension over Freddie Gray's unexplained death. Demonstrations continued and some of the protestors engaged in violence resulting in 159 fires, over 200 arrests, store lootings and 15 officers were injured. Maryland Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency and called in the National Guard with 200 troops on the ground. The next day, the Mayor announced a weeklong city-wide curfew beginning at 10pm each night. Other

cities including Denver, Cincinnati, San Diego, Philadelphia and New York City held protests in solidarity with Baltimore.

- A national newspaper published a story stating that the other prisoner in the van with Gray told police that Gray may have been trying to harm himself. But NBC station WBAL of Baltimore reported that medical evidence made available did not suggest that Gray was able to harm himself while in police custody.
 - On May 1, Baltimore State Attorney Marilyn Mosby announced that all six Baltimore police officers involved in the arrest of Freddie Gray would face criminal charges. One officer was charged with second-degree murder and the other officers with offenses that included involuntary manslaughter, vehicular manslaughter, second-degree assault, false imprisonment and misconduct in office.
3. After sharing this information, ask students to turn and talk with a person sitting next to them and respond to the following questions:
 - What did you hear that you did not know before?
 - How do you feel about what you heard?
 - What more do you want to know?
 4. Bring students back together and ask if they want to share aloud anything they talked about with their partners. If you want to provide students with more background or detailed information about the case, have them read one of the articles in the “Additional Reading and Resources” section below.

READING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that as a class, they are going to read several op-eds, editorials or opinion essays with different perspectives on the case of Freddie Gray. Ask: *What is an op-ed?* Explain that an **op-ed** is a piece of writing typically published by newspapers, magazines and online publications that expresses the opinions of a named author. Explain that an **editorial** is an opinion piece written by the senior editorial staff or publisher of a newspaper, magazine or online publication.
2. Divide students into five small groups and distribute a different article to each of the five groups; each member of the small group will read the same article.
 - [“In Baltimore, We’re All Freddie Gray”](#) by D. Watkins
 - [“Baltimore riots and the price of protest”](#) by Dr. John R. Lott Jr.
 - [“To the People of Baltimore: Stop Making Things Worse”](#) (Editors, National Review)
 - [“Violence in Baltimore”](#) by Charles M. Blow
 - [“It’s time to seriously rethink ‘zero tolerance’ policing”](#) by Eugene Robinson
3. Instruct students to silently read their article. Give students 7–10 minutes to read and another 10 minutes to discuss the article among the group, instructing them to take notes on their discussion as they will be presenting it later. Have them decide in advance who will be presenting to the whole class (it can be one, some or all members of group). Have students use the following questions to facilitate the discussion (also write or project them on board/smart board for all to see):
 - What is the position of person writing article?
 - What evidence did they use to make their case?
 - What points do you find persuasive?

- What points do you find lacking?
 - Did the article impact your point of view and if so, how?
 - Does the writer's position resonate with you? Do you agree or disagree with the writer?
4. Have each group present the results of their small group discussion with the whole class. Allow for some questions and discussion after each group presents.

WRITING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that they will now write their own opinion pieces about the case in Baltimore. The essays will be evidence-based argumentative essays, which means that students will have to take a position and provide evidence to support their position, similar to an op-ed or editorial. The writing can begin in class and be assigned for homework. Students may need to do additional research which should factor into the decision of how much time you will give them to complete their writing.
2. Ask students: *What are some possible topics related to the case you can address in your essay?* Brainstorm a list which could include some of the following:
 - Freddie Gray's death and whether police should have been arrested
 - The role of policing in poor communities and communities of color
 - The challenges police face in poor neighborhoods
 - The role of protest, non-violence and rioting
 - Baltimore's structural poverty, racism and segregation
 - Disparities in the criminal justice system
3. Have students begin their essay in class by having them work on the [Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer](#). Explain that they will complete the rest of the organizer and the essay for homework over the next days or weeks. They can use any of the articles and data shared in class as well as additional research they conduct themselves. The overall steps in the process should include:
 - a. Decide on your position statement.
 - b. Consider 2–3 reasons for your position.
 - c. Gather evidence such as examples, statistics, quotes, polls, facts, etc.
 - d. Organize opinion and evidence using the [Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer](#).
 - e. Write your essay and include the following:
 - Description of the issue or controversy and your opinion statement (You may also include the counter-argument)
 - 2–3 reasons for your opinion with supporting evidence (examples, historical information, statistics, polls, quote and facts).
 - Restate your opinion, summarize your reasons and state your call to action or summary position

CLOSING

Have students each share what their position statements will be in their essays.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“Amid Baltimore Turmoil, Students and Educators Seek Understanding”](#) (*Education Week*, May 1, 2015)
- [“Baltimore Goes Beyond Freddie Gray”](#) (*Newsweek*, April 28, 2015)
- [“DOJ opens civil rights investigation in Freddie Gray case”](#) (WBAL TV, April 21, 2015)
- [“Freddie Gray: From Baltimore arrest to protests, a timeline of the case”](#) (MSNBC, May 1, 2015)
- [Mapping the Clashes Between Baltimore Police and Protesters](#) (*The New York Times*, April 28, 2015)
- [“The world, and our kids, are watching Baltimore in the wake of Freddie Gray”](#) (*The Baltimore Sun*, May 1, 2015)
- [Timeline and charges in Freddie Gray case](#) (*The Washington Post*)
- [“Views You Can Use: A Violent Night in Baltimore”](#) (U.S. News & World Report, April 28, 2015)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: 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.
Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: 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.

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Paragraph 1: INTRODUCTION

Attention-grabbing opening:

Background of Issue:

My position:

(May include counter-argument)

Paragraph 2: Reason #1

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 3: Reason #2

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 4: Reason #3

Supporting Evidence:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

Paragraph 5: CONCLUSION

Restate opinion:

Summarize your three reasons:

State your “call to action” or summary position: