

Should Corporations Speak Out on Voter Suppression Laws and Other Injustices?

Compelling Question: What is the responsibility of powerful entities (corporations, celebrities, athletes and other influencers) to speak out on issues of social justice?

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Common Core Anchor: Reading: R1, R2 Writing: W1, W4 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2 Language: L4, L6	SEL: Self-Awareness Social Awareness Relationship Skills Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS			



Web Related Connections

Lessons

- [Athletes and Activism](#)
- [Believe in Something: Nike, Kaepernick and Social Change](#)
- [Game Changer: Kyle Korver Speaks Truth on Privilege](#)
- [Lonnie Chavis of 'This Is Us' Writes about Racism](#)

Other Resources

- [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#)
- [Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)
- [Sports and Social Justice](#)
- [What is Voter Suppression?](#)

Key Words

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| accountability | legislation |
| activists | leverage |
| advocates | opposition |
| ban | outcry |
| cloud | prominent |
| corporations | provisional |
| corrosive | rebuke |
| criminalize | revoke |
| divesting | retaliated |
| galvanizing | restriction |
| influence | tepid |
| injustice | unambiguously |

LESSON OVERVIEW

In March 2021, the Georgia State Legislature passed a major law (SB 202) that restricts and suppresses voting across the state. Democrats, voting rights groups and other advocates criticized and condemned the law, saying it limits voting rights and it unfairly targets voters of color. They called on and pressured corporations, especially those based in Georgia, to speak out about the new law. While some of these corporations had an initial tepid response, after the law passed and pressure mounted, Coca Cola, Delta, Major League Baseball and others released statements condemning the law.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn about Georgia’s new voting laws and the corporations who spoke out about it, explore their own opinions about corporate responsibility to speak out and reflect on how they can influence corporations and others to take action on issues of social injustice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Georgia’s new voting law and the companies who have spoken out against it.
- Students will reflect on their opinions and perspectives about the role corporations and other powerful entities should play in speaking out on social justice issues.
- Students will explore their role as influencers and plan actions they can take to influence powerful entities to take a stand about social justice issues.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Background Information on Georgia’s Restrictive Voting Law SB 202 and Corporations and Others that Spoke Out about It](#)
- “Companies Condemn Georgia’s Restrictive Voting Law Amid Pressure Campaign From Advocates” (*TIME*, April 2, 2021, <https://time.com/5952337/corporations-condemn-georgia-voting-law>), copy for each student
- Here I Stand statement signs (prepared in advance): “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “In between/not sure,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.”

- [Influencer Project Worksheet](#) (one copy for each student)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students:
 - Have you heard anything about a new voting law in Georgia?
 - What did you hear?
 - Have you heard anything about Coke, Delta and Major League Baseball getting involved?
2. Based on what students already know, share some or all the [Background Information on Georgia's Restrictive Voting Law SB 202 and Corporations and Others that Spoke Out about It](#).
3. After sharing this information, engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What are your thoughts and feelings after hearing this information?
 - What is new information for you?
 - How does learning this information challenge your thinking about what you thought previously?



Reading Activity

1. Distribute the article, "[Companies Condemn Georgia's Restrictive Voting Law Amid Pressure Campaign From Advocates](#)" to all students and give them 10–15 minutes to read it silently or read aloud together with students taking turns reading. As an alternative, have students read for homework the evening before.
2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions:
 - What are some of the big ideas discussed in the article?
 - What are some of the tactics voting rights advocates used to influence corporations to take a stand?
 - What else do the advocates want the corporations to do?
 - What does "It's not enough to talk the talk; you have to walk the walk" mean to you?
 - How do you think the companies' speaking out can help with voting rights, either in Georgia or across the country?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before? What was surprising?
 - How did the article challenge your prior thinking about these issues?
 - What's your biggest takeaway from the article?

Here I Stand Activity

1. Explain to students that they will listen to some statements about corporations and other influencers and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. They will be indicating their opinion about each topic by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.
2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a STRONGLY AGREE response and the farthest left point a STRONGLY DISAGREE response. In between, place AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, and DISAGREE along the continuum.

Note: If you are teaching this lesson online, use [Mentimeter](#) ("Scales") to create the continuum and provide the same selection of words—agree, disagree, etc., inviting students to select a response based on each statement.

3. Read some or all the statements below—one at a time—requesting students to take some time to decide where they stand in the continuum, move silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. Following each statement, after everyone has chosen their spot, have one or two students from each group share their reasons for standing where they are. Allow students to move upon hearing the reasons.
 - Corporations and other influencers (celebrities, athletes, etc.) should not get involved in politics.
 - Corporations and other influencers should put pressure on elected officials to influence laws and policies.
 - When corporations and other influencers take a stand about important issues, that can influence public opinion.
 - Corporations and other influencers don't know much about these issues.
 - Making a statement after a law passes is too little and too late.
 - We can't expect corporations to care about political and civil rights issues; they are primarily focused on making money.
 - Companies that speak out about social justice issues are just trying to look good, promote themselves and get more business.
 - I don't care what corporations, celebrities and other influencers think about politics.
 - We, as young people, and others have a powerful role as consumers in pressuring companies to speak out.
4. Reconvene the class and engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand? How so?
 - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you?
 - How about when most people were standing somewhere else?
 - Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand but you didn't feel you had the opportunity to do so? If so, why did you feel this way?
 - Did engaging in this activity either clarify or change your opinion about anything? If so, how?
 - What did you learn from this activity?

Taking Action: How Can We Influence the Influencers?

1. Ask students: *What actions can we take, like what is happening in Georgia, to get corporations and other influencers to speak out and do something about issues of injustice?* Brainstorm a list of ideas they have about how to do that. The list might look something like this:
 - Post about it on social media and tag the companies and other influencers.
 - Attend and speak out at protests.
 - Write letters and emails to the companies.
 - Sign letters and petitions that other advocates organize.
 - Hold a forum at school or join with other schools and invite the press to bring more awareness to the issue.
 - Write a letter to newspaper.
 - Make a list of people you or your family members might know or be connected to and reach out to them.
 - Use our own collective power and engage in similar tactics as these corporations.
2. Have students reflect on issues of injustice that are important to them—these issues can be school, community or societal issues (e.g., bias and bullying, voting rights, climate change, Black Lives Matter, gun reform, etc.). Create a list of all the possible issues they want to focus on.

3. Have students then turn and talk with a partner to create a list of who the potential influencers are, using their phones or other devices to conduct some preliminary research. Then have students share ideas aloud and create an overall list.
4. Have students select an issue they care about, identify an influencer (corporation, athlete, influencer, Youtuber, etc.) and then create something to reach out to influence that influencer, which should culminate in one of the following strategies: (1) a series of social media posts, tagging the potential influencers, (2) a persuasive letter to the company, or (3) an essay or speech on the issue. They can use the [Influencer Project Worksheet](#) to plan it out. Provide time in class and then for homework for students to bring this project to completion.

Closing

Have students share the beginning of their letter, essay or speech or if they haven't started yet, share what issue they will be addressing.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“6 Companies That Have Taken Bold Stands on Social Issues”](#) (Just Capital, September 23, 2019)
- [“All the companies opposing Georgia’s voting restrictions”](#) (Independent)
- [“Based On A Lie’ — Georgia Voting Law Faces Wave Of Corporate Backlash”](#) (NPR, April 1, 2021)
- [“Black Executives Call on Corporations to Fight Restrictive Voting Laws”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 31, 2021)
- [“Flood of CEOs, corporations speak out against Georgia's voting restrictions”](#) (Axios, April 2, 2021)
- [“Georgia G.O.P. Passes Major Law to Limit Voting Amid Nationwide Push”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 25, 2021)
- [“Stacey Abrams: Corporate America must pick a side on voting rights, prevent a Georgia repeat”](#) (*USA Today*, March 31, 2021)
- [“The Jolt: Patagonia giving \\$1 million for voting rights after new Georgia law”](#) (*The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, April 6, 2021)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: 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.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: 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.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Self-Management: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Background Information on Georgia’s Restrictive Voting Law SB 202 and Corporations and Others that Spoke Out about It

- In March 2021, the Georgia State Legislature passed a major law (SB 202) that would restrict voting across the state. It includes a variety of measures that will restrict voting including more rigid voter ID requirements for absentee ballots; limits on drop boxes and the use of them during early voting; voters having less time to request absentee ballots; making it a misdemeanor to give away water or food to voters online; and expanding the state Legislature’s power over elections.
- Democrats and voting rights groups criticized and condemned the law, saying that it limits voting rights and it unfairly target voters of color. Georgia is not alone: As of March 24, 2021, lawmakers in forty-seven states have carried over or introduced 361 bills that would make it harder to vote.
- After the bill passed, Democrats, voting rights and other advocates called on corporations, specifically Georgia-based companies, to speak out about the restrictive voting law. In an effort led by two Black corporate Chief Executives, Kenneth Chenault (former chief executive of American Express) and Kenneth Frazier (chief executive of Merck), dozens of the most prominent Black business leaders joined together to call on companies to fight the law.
- The most prominent corporations that spoke out include Coca Cola, Delta and Major League Baseball (MLB), who moved the All-Star Game to another state. In an official statement, Coca-Cola’s CEO said that the company opposed any measures that would “seek to diminish or restrict voter access” and that it would be “supporting federal legislation that protects voting access and addresses voter suppression across the country.” Delta, who originally made a statement in support of the law, later said “the final bill is unacceptable and does not match Delta’s values.” MLB moved the All-Star game, scheduled to take place in Atlanta, to Denver, CO. Other companies that have spoken out about the bill include Microsoft, Facebook Apple, Google, Patagonia, and Salesforce.
- It is interesting to note that Stacey Abrams, Georgia voting rights activist and former candidate for Georgia Governor, said she was proud of MLB for speaking out against the voting rights law. At the same time, she expressed disappointment that the game was being relocated and she didn’t want to see “Georgia families hurt by lost events and jobs.”
- Actor Will Smith and director Antoine Fuqua decided to pull their upcoming film production (Apple Studios) of *Emancipation* out of Georgia because of the new voting law.
- There are many examples throughout history when corporations, celebrities, athletes and other influencers have spoken out about issues of injustice in order to influence policy and legislation. For example, in May 2020 after George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent protests and “racial reckoning” taking place across the U.S., many companies made statements supporting Black Lives Matter, calling out systemic racism, setting targets for diversifying their businesses, investing in Black-focused financial institutions, donating to Black Lives Matter and supporting other strategies. At the same time, there has been criticism of these efforts, arguing that they are mostly symbolic and aren’t effective in bringing about real change.

Influencer Project Worksheet

Directions: Once you have selected an issue you care about and identified an influencer (corporation, athlete, influencer, Youtuber, etc.), use this worksheet to outline the information you need to create something to reach out to influence your influencer, which should culminate in one of the following strategies: (1) a series of social media posts, tagging the potential influencers, (2) a persuasive letter to the company, or (3) an essay or speech on the issue.

Social Justice Issue

Why I Care about this Issue

Potential Influencers

What I Want to Say to Influencer about the Issue

1

2

3

Call to Action (What I Want Them to Say or Do)