

# Investigating Gaps in Liberty:

## *Identifying Issues and Getting the Facts Before Taking Action*



### BIG IDEAS

- › Social issues are different from personal issues and require collective action to address.
- › Investigating a social issue gives you more power to take action.



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- › Differentiate between a 'personal issue' and a 'social issue.'
- › Examine the importance of investigating a social issue before taking action.



### VOCABULARY

**Action** › Any of a variety of things people do to address social issues and support liberty

**Gap in liberty** › a situation where liberty is blocked

**Hero of liberty** › someone who takes action to make change that supports liberty for all

**Investigate** › do research to find out what causes a social issue to exist

**Liberty** › the ability to think and act how you want, while letting others do the same

**Respect** › understanding each person's inherent right to liberty

**Responsibility** › a sense of duty or obligation to do something

### THEME

Heroes of Liberty

### GRADE LEVEL

4-8

### TIME

45 minutes

### MATERIALS

- › *Social Issues: Gaps in Liberty* worksheet
- › *Investigation: Getting the Facts Right* handout
- › *Conviction – Official Movie Trailer*. You can access the video:
  - On our website, with this lesson plan.
  - On YouTube: <http://youtu.be/NrPtr0aQx3s>
  - On TeacherTube: <http://www.teachertube.com/video/340865>
- › *The True Story Behind 'Conviction.'* You can access the video:
  - On our website, with this lesson plan.
  - On YouTube: [http://youtu.be/fCZ03\\_sW7VQ](http://youtu.be/fCZ03_sW7VQ)
  - On TeacherTube: <http://www.teachertube.com/video/340870>
- › Computer, projector and screen to show videos



## Directions

### INTRODUCTION

1. Ask students to recall what they learned about 'gaps in liberty' and 'heroes of liberty' at the National Liberty Museum. Have them share with a partner and then have volunteers share with the class.
  - › At the *Flame of Liberty* sculpture (by Dale Chihuly), students learned about 'gaps in liberty,' or situations where liberty is blocked, from apartheid, to poverty, to bullying.

## Investigating Gaps in Liberty cont'd.



## VOCABULARY

**Social issue** › something that negatively affects the liberty of community members; a social issue is different from a personal issue because it affects many different people in similar situations, and community action is needed to address it.

**Wrongly convicted** › found guilty of a crime you did not commit



## CHARACTER CONNECTION

Students learn that ‘heroes of liberty’ willingly take on **responsibility** to address social issues, because they **respect** each person’s inherent right to liberty.



## ACADEMIC STANDARDS

**Common Core Language Arts**

## CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4-8.1 ›

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**PA Civics and Government**

5.2.5.C › Explain why individuals become involved in leadership and public service.

**NJ Social Studies**

6.1.4.A.12 › Explain the process of creating change at the local, state, or national level.

- › They also learned about ‘heroes of liberty,’ or people who take action to close the gaps, such as Nelson Mandela, Wangari Maathai, and Young Heroes from around the region.

**PERSONAL ISSUES VS. SOCIAL ISSUES**

2. Tell students that **gaps in liberty** are also called **social issues**. Distribute the *Social Issues: Gaps in Liberty* worksheet to students.
3. Review the information on the worksheet, including the definition of a **social issue**. A social issue is **something that negatively affects the liberty of community members**. A social issue is different from a personal issue, because:
  - › A social issue affects many different people in similar situations, instead of just the people in a specific situation, and
  - › The community needs to get involved to address a social issue.
4. Have students pair up and complete the brainstorming activity at the bottom of the *Social Issues: Gaps in Liberty* worksheet, in which they think of examples of personal issues vs. social issues.
5. Allow students to share some examples from their chart. Select a couple of examples to check against the criteria for a social issue, **to help reinforce what makes an issue a social issue**:
  - › Is this issue specific to just the people in this exact situation? Or are there lots of different people who are experiencing this same problem in similar situations?
  - › Can the people in this situation handle this on their own? Or do they need the community to address the issue?

If you wish, create a class list of social issues from the brainstorm, on chart paper or the board.

6. So, gaps in liberty are also called social issues. And **heroes of liberty** are the people who take action to address them. Ask students, “**How do you think heroes of liberty learn about social issues in the first place?**”
7. After giving students time to respond to the previous question, tell them they are going to watch a short video telling the story of someone who took **action** to protect **liberty** for someone else.

**FROM PERSONAL HERO TO ‘HERO OF LIBERTY’**

8. Show students the video, *Conviction – Official Movie Trailer* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010). You can access the video:
  - › On our website, with this lesson plan.
  - › On YouTube: <http://youtu.be/NrPtr0aQx3s>
  - › On TeacherTube: <http://www.teachertube.com/video/340865>

## Investigating Gaps in Liberty cont'd.

## NOTES

9. To check students' understanding of the story, ask:
  - > "What was the issue (or problem) Betty Anne's brother, Kenny, was facing?"
  - > "What did Betty Anne do about it?"
10. To get students to think more deeply about the story, ask, "Why did Betty Anne do all of this work to free Kenny?" Give students time to share responses to this question.
11. Ask students, "Was Kenny's issue a personal issue or a social issue?" Use the criteria to help you decide:
  - > Is Kenny the only one affected by this issue, or could there be other people in similar situations facing the same problem?
  - > Can Kenny and Betty Anne address this issue on their own or do they need the community to take action?
12. It's OK if students are unsure how to answer this question. It is often difficult to know whether a problem we're personally experiencing is part of a larger social issue or not. Ask students, "What kinds of information would we need, in order to know if the issue Kenny is facing is part of a social issue?" Possible responses:
  - > Does this happen to other people? How many other people?
  - > Is there any kind of community action being taken to address this issue?

Next, students will get some information to help them answer these questions.

13. Tell students **heroes of liberty** often start out unsure of exactly what their **issue** is, or what **action** they should take. But they know they want to do something. So they start by **investigating**.

### INVESTIGATING AN ISSUE

14. Distribute the handout, *Investigation: Getting the Facts Right*. Review the information with students, or have them read and discuss in pairs.
15. Revisit the question of whether Kenny's issue is a personal or **social issue**:
  - > Ask students, "**Kenny was wrongfully convicted. Are other people wrongfully convicted?**" (Yes, an estimated 2-5% of people in prison in the U.S.)
  - > Ask students, "**Does this sound like an issue that needs community action to address?**" (The Innocence Project and other activists are working to address this issue.)

## Investigating Gaps in Liberty cont'd.

## NOTES

16. Highlight the conclusion that **wrongful conviction** is a **social issue**, and the Innocence Project is a group of **heroes of liberty** who work with people like Betty Anne and Kenny to address the issue one case at a time. They use **investigation** to arm themselves with knowledge before taking action.

## RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY

17. Show students the video, *The True Story Behind 'Conviction.'* You can access the video:
- > On our website, with this lesson plan.
  - > On YouTube: [http://youtu.be/fCZ03\\_sW7VQ](http://youtu.be/fCZ03_sW7VQ)
  - > On TeacherTube: <http://www.teachertube.com/video/340870>
18. **Ask students what stood out to them** or what they learned from the video, and give them time to share responses.
19. In the video, we learned that Betty Anne is still working with the Innocence Project. She worked for two decades to get her brother out of jail. She won that battle. Ask students, “**After her brother was free, why do you think Betty Anne kept working with the Innocence Project to get other innocent people out of jail?**” Have a few volunteers share responses.
20. Provide students with the following definitions of respect and responsibility:
- > **Respect** – understanding each person’s inherent right to liberty
  - > **Responsibility** – a sense of duty or obligation to do something
21. So, in other words: **Respect** means everybody has a right to liberty, no matter who they are. And **responsibility** means you feel like you should do something. Ask students, “**How did Betty Anne use respect and responsibility in her decision to keep working to get innocent people out of jail, even after her brother was free?**” Give students time to share responses with a partner and then for a few pairs to share out with the class.

## WRAP-UP

22. As an Exit Ticket, have students respond to the following prompt:  
**Everyone told Betty Anne Waters there was no way she would ever be able to free her brother. So many obstacles stood in their way. What made it possible for her to win?**



## Optional Extension

Follow up on the class list of social issues by choosing an issue and having students brainstorm a list of questions they could investigate to learn more about it. What sources could they use? Who could they talk to? What experience or prior knowledge do they have about the issue?

# Social Issues

## *Gaps in Liberty*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

A **social issue** is something that negatively affects the **liberty** of community members.

An issue is like a problem. You can probably think of some personal issues that you deal with every day. **A social issue is different from a personal issue because:**

- > it affects many different people in similar situations, and
- > community participation is needed to address it.

### CAN YOU THINK OF ANY SOCIAL ISSUES?

You might remember learning about some at the National Liberty Museum. With a partner, see how many examples of personal issues and social issues you can think of:



#### PERSONAL ISSUES

*Example:* Parents won't let me add another after-school activity

#### SOCIAL ISSUES

*Example:* After-school activities cut out because of budget cuts

## Investigation

### Getting the Facts Right

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**SOCIAL ISSUE:**  
Wrongful Conviction

**HEROES OF LIBERTY:**  
The Innocence Project



The Innocence Project works to get innocent people out of jail by using DNA evidence to prove they didn't commit the crime. When someone is found guilty of a crime they didn't commit, this is called **wrongful conviction**.

It is estimated that between 2% and 5% of people in prison in the United States have been wrongfully convicted. Even if only 1% of people in prison were innocent, that would mean 20,000 innocent people are in prison in the United States. The Innocence Project has helped free 171 people since 1989.

Every year, 3,000 people write to the Innocence Project to ask for help. For each request, the first thing the Innocence Project does is **investigate**. They do research to gather enough information to know whether it's a case they can help with. If it is, they take the case.

Then, guess what they do? More investigation. They're going to have to prove their case in court. They need to make sure they have their facts straight. For example, in the case of Betty Anne and Kenny Waters, whose story is featured in the movie *Conviction*, Betty Anne and the Innocence Project worked together to:

- › Study 16-year-old evidence from the case files
- › Get a DNA test on the murderer's blood, from the crime scene
- › Get a DNA test on Kenny Waters' blood
- › Compare the two blood samples to establish that Kenny wasn't the murderer

They **investigated** to get the facts straight, before they went charging into a courtroom to restore liberty for Kenny. And did they win? Yes!

**Heroes of liberty** know that knowledge is power. The more you know about your issue, the more power you have to take action.

## SOURCES

The Innocence Project: <http://www.innocenceproject.org/about/FAQs.php>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/04/justice/prisoner-exonerations-facts-innocence-project/>