



*American Idealist:
The Story of Sargent Shriver*

LESSON PLANS TO ACCOMPANY THE FILM



Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

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ABOUT FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

Facing History and Ourselves is a nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-semitism in order to promote a more humane and informed citizenry. As the name Facing History and Ourselves implies, the organization helps teachers and their students make the essential connections between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives by examining the development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide. It is a study that helps young people think critically about their own behavior and the effect that their actions have on their community, nation and the world. It is based on the belief that no classroom should exist in isolation. Facing History programs and materials involve the entire community: students, parents, teachers, civic leaders, and other citizens.

Facing History and Ourselves provides educators with tools for teaching history and ethics, and for helping their students learn to combat prejudice with compassion, indifference with participation, myth and misinformation with knowledge. Through significant higher education partnerships, Facing History also reaches and impacts teachers before they enter their classrooms.

By studying the choices that led to a historical event, students learn how issues of identity and membership play out on the world stage. Facing History resource books provide a meticulously researched yet flexible structure for examining complex events and ideas. Educators can select appropriate readings and draw on additional resources available online or from our comprehensive lending library.

Our foundational resource text, *Facing History and Ourselves Holocaust and Human Behavior*, embodies a sequence of study which begins with identity—first individual identity and then group identities with their definitions of membership. From there the program examines the failure of democracy in Germany and the steps leading to the Holocaust—the most documented case of 20th century indifference, de-humanization, hatred, racism, antisemitism, and mass murder. It goes on to explore difficult questions of judgment, memory and legacy, and the necessity for responsible participation to prevent injustice, ending with a section called “Choosing to Participate” that provides examples of individuals who have taken small steps to build just and inclusive communities and whose stories illuminate the courage, initiative and compassion that are needed to protect democracy today and in generations to come. Other examples of collective violence such as the Armenian genocide and the U.S civil rights movement expand and deepen the connection between history and the choices we face today and in the future.

Facing History’s outreach is global, with a website accessed world wide, online content delivery, a program for international fellows, and a set of NGO partnerships that allow for delivery of our resources in 80 countries. By convening conferences of scholars, theologians, educators and journalists Facing History’s materials are kept timely, relevant and responsive to salient issues of global citizenship in the 21st century.

For more than thirty years, Facing History has challenged students to connect the complexities of the past to the moral and ethical issues of today. Students explore democratic values and consider what it means to exercise one’s rights and responsibilities in the service of a more humane and compassionate world. They become aware that “little things are big”—seemingly minor decisions can have major impacts, and change the course of history.

For more about Facing History, visit our website at <http://www.facinghistory.org>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Facing History and Ourselves expresses much gratitude to Bruce Orenstein and the Chicago Video Project for providing the funding and support to make these lesson plans possible. We also extend a special thank you to the Sargent Shriver Peace Institute for donating the services to digitize the film clips for use with these lesson plans.

There are a number of Facing History and Ourselves' staff who deserve recognition: Elisabeth Kanner wrote the lesson plans. Margot Stern Strom, Marc Skvirsky, Adam Strom, Tracy Garrison-Feinberg, and Dimitry Anselme made numerous, thoughtful contributions to the text. Finally, Brooke Harvey and Nicole Breaux managed the project.

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INTRODUCTION

The film *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver* tells the story of a man who exemplified what it means to be a public servant. From his youth volunteering in tenement housing with his father, to his service in the military, to his role as director of the Peace Corps and the War on Poverty, Shriver consistently strived to live up to his belief that “[O]f all of our ideals none surpasses the importance of service.”¹ Because of his role in American politics, international diplomacy, and nonprofit organizations, Shriver’s biographer, Scott Stossel, claims that Shriver “has probably had an effect on more Americans and more people across the world than anyone who hasn’t been a president or a world leader and probably even more than some of them.”² A study of Shriver’s life invites questions such as, “What does it mean to be an idealist?”; “What is public service and why is it important?”; and “How can public policy be used to address social problems such as poverty?” In the lessons we have developed to support classroom use of *American Idealist*, students discover Shriver’s answers to these questions as a way to help them develop their own ideas about social responsibility.

In depicting the life of Sargent Shriver, *American Idealist* also tells the story of modern American history from the Depression through the Vietnam War. From viewing this film, students can see how Shriver’s life was affected by critical historical moments in American history, such as the 1929 stock market crash, the civil rights movement, the assassination of President Kennedy, and the Vietnam War. By personalizing the past, *American Idealist* can help engage students in the study of American history. It can also teach students important lessons about the American political process. Watching Shriver navigate the public policy arena provides concrete examples of the tensions between the branches of government, local versus federal authority, as well as the intricacies of how legislation gets passed and how programs receive funding.

While *American Idealist* focuses on American political history, the issues raised in the film resonate with our contemporary global experience. Almost 50 years ago when working as director of the Peace Corps, Shriver remarked, “[T]he world is a real community.”³ Today, with advances in travel and communication, that statement has never been more true. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, one of the fundamental questions facing governments, institutions, and citizens is how to intervene when communities are damaged by national disasters or civil unrest, and how to support people who struggle to attain basic human rights. Learning about the work of Sargent Shriver exposes ideas and strategies that might help us address the global challenges we face today. For example, Shriver reminds us how the act of caring does not stop at national borders. He explained how Peace Corps volunteers “learned that people can cross barriers of language and culture and customs. . . . They have learned to hear the voice of the human heart in any language.”⁴ And his work as director of the War on Poverty demonstrates that it is possible for governments to design programs to “help people to help themselves.”⁵

¹ *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver*, DVD (Chicago: Chicago Video Project, 2006).

² Scott Stossel, *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), p. 34.

³ *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

As adolescents develop an increasing sense of responsibility for their own lives, they are also in the position to consider, “What impact do I want to have on others? Am I only responsible for myself? To whom might I also have a responsibility?” In telling the story of Sargent Shriver’s desire to invest in the dignity of every human being, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion, *American Idealist* presents one set of answers to these questions. Thus, studying Shriver’s life provides an opportunity for students to broaden their understanding of civic participation and reflect on their responsibilities to individuals in their classroom, school, neighborhood, nation, and larger world.

HOW TO USE THESE LESSONS

These lessons have been designed to accompany the film *American Idealist*. Teachers in the Facing History network can borrow *American Idealist* from the Facing History and Ourselves Library. The Sargent Shriver Peace Institute (www.sargentshriver.com) is hosting the film on their website as well.

We strongly suggest teachers watch the entire film. While students will benefit from watching the entire film, we have highlighted particular excerpts that reveal important information about idealism, public service, and public policy. The lessons include links to the specific excerpts from the film used in the suggested activity.

We hope these lessons are a stimulus for teachers’ own curriculum development; this is not a scripted curriculum. The lessons can be used together as a short unit or they can be used separately. We expect teachers will adapt the activities and assignments suggested in these lessons to meet the needs of their own students and school context. Knowing that teachers with varying contexts (e.g., length of class period, number of students, skill level of students, etc.) will be using this resource, we do not intend each lesson to fit neatly into one class period. If you are concerned about running out of time, you can shorten the warm-up activity or assign the follow-through activity for homework. These three lessons could easily engage students for many class periods, especially if you choose to implement any of the extension activities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Choosing to Participate Study Guide

Sargent Shriver Peace Institute: <http://www.sargentshriver.com>. This website contains many documents that can supplement the film, including photographs and speeches.

American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver: <http://www.americanidealistmovie.org>. This is the film’s official website.

LESSON 1

What Is an Idealist?

OVERVIEW

Why should students study the life of Sargent Shriver? While there are many ways to answer this question, one answer that inspired the production of this film was the belief that Shriver's life offers important lessons about the power of idealism to solve social problems such as poverty, to promote peace, and to nurture civic participation. Explaining his decision to title the film *American Idealist*, Bruce Orenstein, the film's producer, explains,

Actually nobody explicitly stated to me that Sarge Shriver was an idealist. In fact for many, the word *idealist* carries connotations of someone whose thoughts about life are unrealizable, not practical. Yet, virtually to a person, when I talked with Shriver's colleagues and friends they used the term *idealist*.¹

In this lesson, students will gain a deeper understanding of idealism through exploring Shriver's life and accomplishments. Watching *American Idealist* will give students a rich collection of evidence documenting Shriver's idealism. For example, when Shriver is asked by a reporter, "Do you really believe that poverty can be wiped out?" Shriver responds assertively, "Yes, I do." Throughout the film, we see Shriver taking on challenges wholeheartedly, whether it was the Peace Corps or the War on Poverty. A friend and colleague of Shriver, Edgar May, described Shriver's idealism best when he said,

We were talking about outlandish dreams—unrealistic expectations. Whether it was Sarge Shriver saying "No, no, no, we're not going to have 50,000 children in Head Start this summer; we're going to have half a million . . ." that's vintage Sargent Shriver. Optimism. Hope.

Viewing the whole film will give students a deeper understanding of Shriver's idealism and how this idealism influenced his approach to public policy. Viewing the opening (Chapter 1) and Chapter 2 of the film provides students with sufficient information to begin to analyze Shriver's idealism and how it was fueled by his biography.

Students begin the lesson by thinking about the meaning of the word *idealist*. Even students who are unfamiliar with this word can begin to tease apart its meaning by looking closely at the word's root—"ideal." The abstract concept of idealism is made more concrete when students have to identify an idealist from their own lives. A discussion about what makes these people idealistic provides a vehicle for reflecting on the dictionary definition of the term. Throughout this lesson, students will build on their understanding of what it means to be an idealist, and by the end of this lesson they will construct their own definition of this term.

In the main activity of this lesson, students watch selected portions of *American Idealist*. (As mentioned above, this lesson could also be implemented with students viewing the entire film.) The three-minute introduction of the film provides information that helps

¹ Bruce Orenstein, personal e-mail, April 28, 2008.

answer the question, “Why did people call Sargent Shriver an idealist?” For example, Colman McCarthy recounts how people told Shriver he was “doomed to fail,” yet Shriver continued to develop new social programs. In this brief clip, we hear Shriver connect actions to values as he proudly explained how Peace Corps volunteers were “letting their actions speak for their hearts and for their minds and their country.” Debriefing the introduction of the film not only provides an opportunity to understand Shriver’s work and attitude, but it also provides another opportunity for students to reflect on the definition of the word *idealist*.

At this point in the lesson, students might wonder how Shriver came to be an “American Idealist.” Adolescence is an important period of identity development. Consciously or unconsciously, students think about who they are, how they came to be that way, and who they want to be. To help students explore questions about identity, it is often useful to provide them with the opportunity to consider how other people’s identities have been shaped by their biographies. In the case of Sargent Shriver, we can explore how his idealism was influenced by his family, friends, personal experiences, and historical context. In Chapter 3 of *American Idealist*, we learn about Hilda Shriver, Sargent’s politically active mother. We see how Robert Shriver, Sargent’s father, took him along when he did charitable work in the tenements of Baltimore or New York. Catholicism is another important aspect of Shriver’s life, as revealed in this film. His parents’ founding of the magazine *Commonweal* is one example of how the Shriver family’s interpretation of Catholicism led them to respect the dignity and humanity of all people, regardless of race, gender, or class. The film also chronicles how Shriver gained personal insights into poverty when his family lost its fortune during the Depression. By using their film notes to construct identity charts for Sargent Shriver, students can synthesize their knowledge about Shriver’s life. This prepares them to discuss the relationship between Shriver’s biography and his idealism.

A discussion of idealism might also focus on the question of why many people associate idealism with being impractical. According to Orenstein, the same individuals who use the term *idealism* when describing Shriver, “strongly objected to the term idealist” in the title of the film. They told Orenstein that Shriver wasn’t an “out of touch,” “pie in the sky” politician. Orenstein explains, “Because Shriver combined both political pragmatism with a hope that we could be different, we could do better . . . one close friend of his actually suggested the film be called *The Practical Idealist*.² What makes Shriver such a fascinating and important subject for study is how he defied the stereotype of the “out of touch” idealist through his pragmatic approach to public policy.

The follow-through activity asks students to present their understanding of idealism as a “recipe.” This task allows students to develop their own interpretation of idealism. While the recipes themselves provide insight into students’ definitions of idealism, it is their explanations—either written or oral—that illuminate how students used the example of Sargent Shriver, in addition to their previous knowledge, to come to this understanding.

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to reflect on the role of idealists in society. Orenstein writes,

² Ibid.

Growth and change cannot come about without people who are passionate about what they believe in and fervently stick to their ideals. The change agents are always idealists. They make us “believe in the horizons of the possible,” as one of Shriver’s colleagues describes him. Idealists are the ones who imagine and work for a world that is more humane and enlightened than what the world’s hardnosed political pragmatics believe it could ever be. Without idealists, there can be no progress.³

Surely Shriver’s style of idealism contributed to progress for the many Americans, and those outside of the United States, who benefited from programs he developed, including Head Start and the Peace Corps.

Ultimately, *American Idealist* presents idealism in a positive light. Yet students might also consider how idealism, if fueled by racist ideology for example, can be very dangerous. A final discussion might focus on how idealism, especially in the form of a powerful leader, has been used and abused throughout history.

Goals

This lesson will help students:

- Define the word *idealist*.
- Explain why Sargent Shriver is described as an idealist.
- Understand the ways in which personal history can impact the beliefs we hold and the choices we make.
- Consider inspirations for idealism from their own experiences.

Duration

At least one hour

Materials

The specific excerpts from *American Idealist* referred to in this lesson can be viewed on the *American Idealist* movie website: <http://americanidealistmovie.org/videoClips2.htm>

- Chapter 1: “Opening” (0:42–4:02)
- Chapter 3: “Growing Up, the Great Depression and World War II” (11:35–18:45).
- Handout 1: *American Idealist* Film Notes for Chapter 3.
- Handout 2: Recipe for Idealism.

Warm-up

Post the words *ideal* and *idealist* on the board and ask students to define these words in their journals.

Then, have students look up the definition of idealist in the dictionary, or you could give them this definition:

Idealist (noun)

1. a person who cherishes or pursues high or noble principles, purposes, goals, etc.
2. a visionary or impractical person
3. a person who represents things as they might or should be, rather than as they are⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Idealist. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/idealist> (accessed on March 30, 2008).

Give students a minute to identify someone they know, from their own life or from history, who is an idealist. In pairs, students can explain why this individual is an idealist. Then students can volunteer to share their examples with the whole class. As students present their examples, help them recognize connections between the description of the individuals and the definition of *idealist*.

Main activity

1. Introduce the film *American Idealist* by having students reflect on the meaning of its title. The following prompts can be used to provoke a class discussion: What might it mean to be an “American Idealist”? What do you think the film will be about? Inform students that the film is about a man named Sargent Shriver and that the purpose of this lesson is to understand who Sargent Shriver was and why he was called an idealist. You might ask them to raise their hands if they have heard of him. Listing some of Shriver’s famous relatives (e.g., Maria Shriver, John F. Kennedy, Arnold Schwarzenegger) is another way to stimulate students’ interest in this material.
2. Show Chapter 1: “Opening” of the film (0:43–3:55). Before viewing this clip, ask students to record any information that might help them answer the question, “Why did people call Sargent Shriver an idealist?” After the clip, each student can present one item they wrote in their notes. Record this list of answers on the board.
3. Once students have an understanding of the values and actions that earned Shriver the “idealist” label, you can ask them to consider the question, “How does someone become an idealist?” Give students a few minutes to write about this question in their journals before showing Chapter 3: “Growing Up, the Great Depression and World War II” (11:46–18:46). This chapter focuses on Shriver’s biography. As students watch this clip, ask them to record information about Shriver’s life—about his family, personal experiences, and historical context. To help students organize their notes, a graphic organizer has been included with this lesson.
4. Students can share their film notes in small groups, adding any information they might have missed. This step prepares students for a class discussion focused on the question, “What aspects of Shriver’s personal history contributed to his idealism?” Other possible discussion prompts include:
 - What ideals formed the foundation of Shriver’s idealism? To what extent do you embrace these ideals?
 - How did Shriver direct his idealism toward projects that made the world a better place? Is it possible for idealism to be directed toward actions that are harmful to people?
 - Why are idealists sometimes called “impractical”?
 - What might the world be like without idealists?

Follow-through

Ask students to create a “recipe for idealism.” For this task, they need to identify the ingredients that go into making someone an idealist, and then consider the relative importance of each of these factors. A worksheet has been provided to help students with this task. Students can explain the rationale behind their recipes in writing or through an oral presentation. The rationale should refer to information from the film *American Idealist* as well as their own knowledge and experiences.

Suggested assessments

- Handout 2: “Recipe for Idealism” and accompanying essays or presentations explaining this recipe (see follow-through for more information).
- Students can turn in an “exit card” where they define the word *idealist* and connect this definition to the life and work of Sargent Shriver.
- Students can write a brief essay answering the questions: Why do you think they decided to call this film *American Idealist*? What aspects of Shriver’s personal history contributed to his idealism?

Extensions

Idealists are not just famous people in history; they are all around us. Students can interview an idealist whom they know personally. As a class, you can develop an interview protocol or you can suggest that students use the following questions:

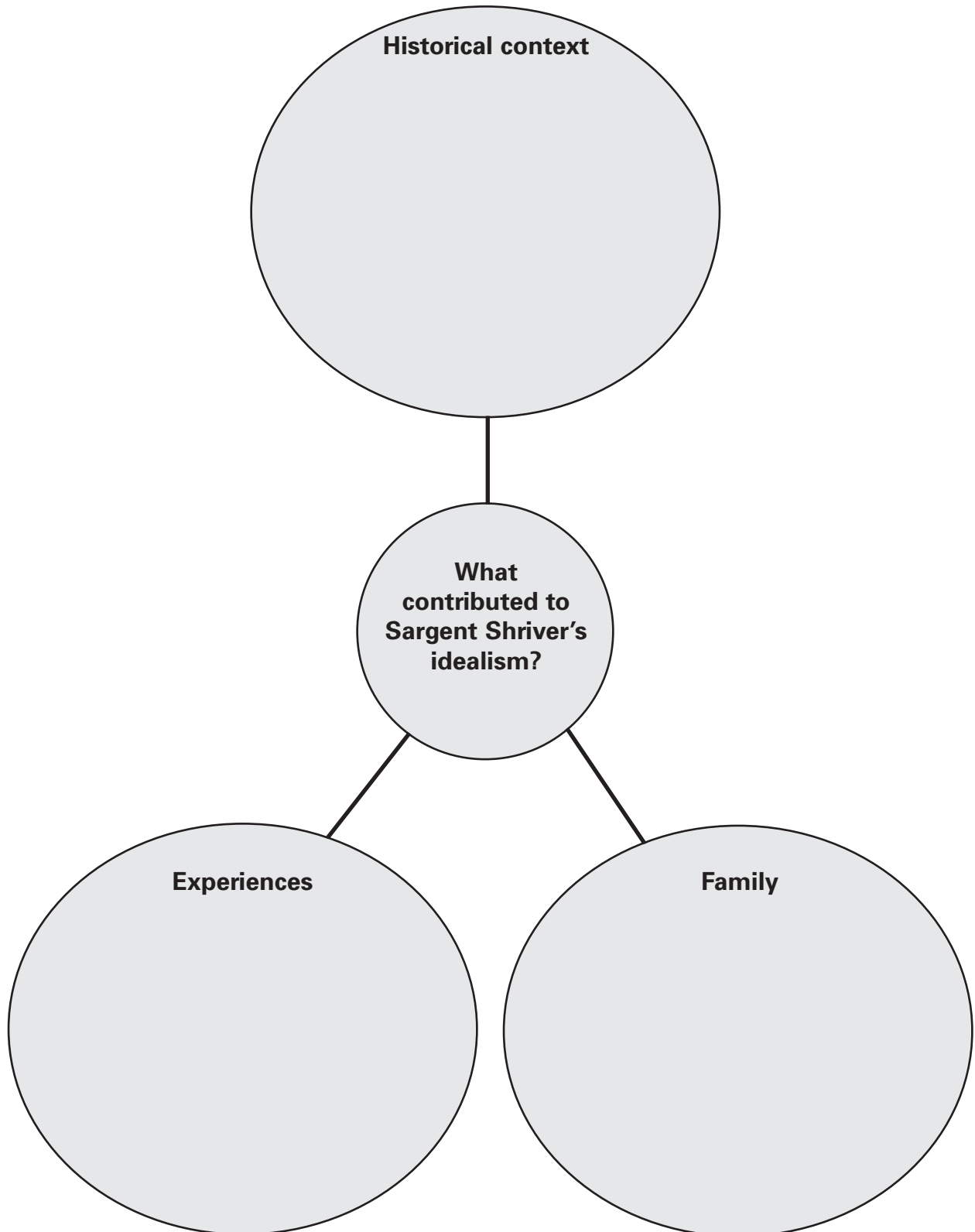
- What ideals do you hold?
- How do these ideals influence your choices and behavior?
- Has there ever been a time when you have compromised your ideals? If so, describe this moment. Why did you compromise? How did this make you feel?
- Would you make this same choice again?
- What is an idealist? Do you consider yourself to be an idealist?

In this lesson, students learn how Sargent Shriver’s biography—his family and his personal experiences—fueled his idealism and the choices he made to commit himself to public service. Students can write their own biographies or draw an identity chart for themselves. Then they can write a personal essay explaining how they think their biographies have shaped their own beliefs, values, and choices.

To many people, the opposite of an idealist is a cynic. To help students understand idealism, you can ask them to define the word *cynic*. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a cynic is “a person who believes all people are motivated by selfishness”⁵ rather than by ideals. A discussion about cynicism and idealism might focus around the questions, “How does idealism shape the way people think about society and the possibilities for change?” and “How does cynicism shape the way people think about society and the possibilities for change?” You can give students stories from the news and ask them how a cynic or an idealist might respond to this event. To be sure, most of us are not complete idealists or complete cynics. As a final activity, students can draw a continuum—labeling one end “idealist” and the other end “cynic.” After asking students to place Sargent Shriver on this continuum, you can have them place themselves on the idealist–cynic continuum. In writing or in a discussion, students can explain their decision and draw connections between their place on the continuum and their own biographies.

Idealism is one theme represented in popular music. Analyzing a song, such as John Lennon’s “Imagine,” can provoke interesting discussion about what it means to be an idealist. Students can identify the ideals, or values, represented by the songwriter. Then, based on the definition of idealist they developed in this lesson, students can address if they think the song represents idealism. Students can also suggest other songs that they think represent idealism.

⁵ Cynic. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/cynic> (accessed on April 18, 2008).



HANDOUT 2: Recipe for Idealism

1. How does someone become an idealist? What contributes to idealism? Brainstorm a list of factors in the “ingredients” column of the chart below. Use your *American Idealist* film notes for ideas.

Ingredients for Idealism	Amount

2. Are some of these factors more important than others? Do you need the same amount of ingredients for each of them? Next to each ingredient record the amount required to make an idealist.

Cooking Measurements

3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon

16 tablespoons = 1 cup

2 cups = 1 pint

2 pints = 1 quart

4 quarts = 1 gallon

3. What must be done with these ingredients? Record the cooking instructions here. Be creative. Consider how heat might be a motivation for action or how it sometimes is necessary for several factors to be blended together.

LESSON 2

Sargent Shriver and Public Service

OVERVIEW

In a speech to university students in 1965, Sargent Shriver remarked, “Built into each individual’s experience must be an occasion for giving, a task of humanity, an act of sharing and sacrifice.”¹ As students learned in Lesson 1, this idea of *public service—performing actions that benefit a larger community*—was central to Shriver’s upbringing. Shriver’s parents, Robert and Hilda, modeled “sharing and sacrifice.” For example, they worked to improve conditions for the poor in New York and they organized support for political causes. As an adult, Shriver continued to serve his community, whether on a battleship in the South Pacific during World War II, as president of the Board of Education in Chicago, as founder of the Special Olympics, or as director of the War on Poverty. When Shriver married Eunice Kennedy in 1953, he joined another family that was committed to public service. In 1961, his brother-in-law, newly elected President John F. Kennedy, asked Shriver to lead the Peace Corps. Made as a campaign promise to university students, the Peace Corps was designed to give young Americans the opportunity to serve their country through volunteer work in developing nations.

This lesson begins by having students learn about the role of university students in laying the ground work for the Peace Corps. In a campaign speech at the University of Michigan, Kennedy asserted, “Americans are willing to contribute.”² The audience took Kennedy up on this challenge by passing around a petition for students to serve overseas after graduation. Since the founding of the Peace Corps in 1961, more than 200,000 volunteers have served overseas.

Why would Michigan students, and eventually students around the country, volunteer for the Peace Corps? Why would Americans, many of them young adults, feel compelled to travel far from home to help people they have never met and who do not speak their language? Mary Johnson, a 1961 Peace Corps volunteer, explained that her cohort had many reasons for volunteering, but chief among them was the desire to “go out into the world and try to make a difference.”³ As students consider why young adults volunteered (and continue to volunteer) to join the Peace Corps, they will also reflect on the role of public service in their own lives.

Often students think about volunteering or public service as something that is done to benefit others. And in the 1960s, critics argued that the Peace Corps was merely a political gesture on the part of the United States government to help win the Cold War through winning “the hearts and minds” of people around the world. So Shriver worked diligently to help Americans, especially lawmakers, recognize that the Peace Corps had a larger purpose—that this program had the potential to solve real problems, such as hunger, while also helping young Americans develop a more expansive definition of their civic responsibility. He explained,

¹ “Address by Sargent Shriver,” St. John’s University, Jamaica, NY, June 13, 1965. http://www.sargentshriver.com/medium_file/file/2206/1965_-_ST_JOHN_S_UNIVERSITY.pdf (accessed on July 16, 2007).

² “Remarks by Senator John F. Kennedy,” University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, October 14, 1960. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1960/Remarks+of+Senator+John+F.+Kennedy+at+the+University+of+Michigan.htm> (accessed on May 23, 2008).

³ Mary Johnson, interview, May 13, 2008.

Peace Corps volunteers . . . have come to realize . . . that the world is a real community. They have learned that people can cross barriers of language and culture and customs. They've learned foreign languages, yes, but more important they have learned to hear the voice of the human heart in any language.⁴

Shriver argued that Peace Corps volunteers and the communities in which they served all benefited from this program. He explained, "You want to be of consequence and this program appeared to convey to people that they could be of consequence in a way that would help people around them, and in a way that would ultimately help themselves."⁵ Mary Johnson agreed with this description, sharing that she learned valuable skills and lifelong lessons about education, democracy, women's rights, and cross-cultural understanding through her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer. "The experience of living in another culture . . . was invaluable," she said.⁶ Thus, one goal for these lessons is to help students not only think about how communities may benefit from public service, but also to analyze the ways individuals can benefit from performing public service.

Another purpose of this lesson is to encourage students to think about who is responsible for performing public service. In *American Idealist* Shriver says, "Of all our ideals none surpasses the importance of service." Why is public service so important? To whom? What would happen if nobody felt responsible to act in ways that benefited a larger community? The concept "universe of responsibility" can help answer these questions. This phrase refers to the individuals and groups we feel obligated to protect and support—the people about whom we care.⁷ Through watching *American Idealist*, students get a sense of how Shriver constructed his universe of responsibility to include individuals from all walks of life—people in rural towns in Mississippi, in villages in Ghana, and in public housing in Chicago. He was loyal to his family but also extended care to those outside of his family, including people with disabilities.

In this lesson, students will consider who they include in their own universe of responsibility and how this answer influences their ideas about public service. Recent reports indicate that many youth may not have the opportunity or the motivation to perform public service. Volunteering among adolescents is now on the decline.⁸ A fact sheet published by CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) in April 2007 reports,

The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report found an eight-percentage point decrease in the volunteer rate among 15- to 25-year-olds from 2002 to 2006. . . . Also, the Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys of twelfth, tenth, and eighth graders all show declines in reported volunteering in recent years.⁹

At the same time, in the article "Saving the World in Study Hall," journalist Nicolas Kristof presents several examples of high school students who have dedicated huge

⁴ *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Mary Johnson, interview, May 13, 2008.

⁷ The phrase "universe of responsibility" is built on psychologist and genocide scholar Helen Fein's "universe of obligation." She has explained that nations construct a universe of obligation to refer to the circle of individuals and groups "towards whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for [amends]." Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 4. Individuals and groups who are not included in a nation's universe of obligation are vulnerable to discrimination and persecution.

⁸ Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, "Volunteering Among Young People," CIRCLE Fact Sheet (April 2007). http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07_Volunteering.pdf (accessed on May 23, 2008).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

amounts of time to help people from all over the world.¹⁰ When confronted with these statistics and stories, students can discuss what motivates people, especially youth, to perform public service, as well as the factors that influence some people to define their universe of responsibility broadly, while others feel a sense of responsibility only to the people they know personally.

Goals

This lesson will help students:

- Define public service.
- Understand the formation and mission of the Peace Corps.
- Identify reasons why people perform public service.
- Refine their own ideas about public service and universe of responsibility.

Duration

At least one hour

Materials

The specific excerpts from *American Idealist* referred to in this lesson can be viewed on the *American Idealist* movie website: <http://americanidealistmovie.org/videoClips2.htm>

- Chapter 5: “Idealism and the Peace Corps” (26:30–34:17).
- Special Feature: “The Student Petition That Inspired the Peace Corps.”
- Chapter 4: “Politics and the Peace Corps,” (18:47–26:29) provides background information about how and why the Peace Corps was started (optional).
- Handout 1: Fishbowl Discussion Preparation Sheet (optional).
- World map (optional).

Warm-up

Distribute the following quotation to students and ask a student to read it aloud:

How many of you, who are going to be doctors, are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world? On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think will depend the answer whether a free society can compete. I think it can! And I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have ever made in the past.¹¹

Give students a few minutes to react to this quotation in writing. The following prompt can be used to provoke their thinking: Imagine you are in college and the president of the United States visited your campus and made these remarks. What message do you think the president is trying to express? How might students react to this message? How might you react?

Allow students the opportunity to discuss their responses with a partner. Then ask students if any of them can guess the context for this quotation. Do they know who said it, and when or where it was said?

¹⁰ Nicholas Kristof, “Saving the World in Study Hall,” *New York Times* (May 11, 2008). <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/11/opinion/11kristof.html?ex=1368158400&en=5e63ed02fe70ad87&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink> (accessed on May 23, 2008).

¹¹ “Remarks by Senator John F. Kennedy,” University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, October 14, 1960. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1960/Remarks+of+Senator+John+F.+Kennedy+at+the+University+of+Michigan.htm> (accessed on May 23, 2008).

Finally, show the clip, “The student petition that inspired the Peace Corps.” You might begin with the footage from October 14, 1960, when Kennedy made a campaign stop at the University of Michigan and where he gave the above-quoted statement (2:00–2:50). Stop here and ask students to predict how the students might have reacted when they heard Kennedy’s words. What might they have done the next day or the next week? Then continue with the rest of the segment that documents one of the ways students responded to Kennedy’s request for service: by initiating the idea of the Peace Corps. Before proceeding to the main part of this lesson, check to make sure students have a basic understanding of the Peace Corps and its mission.

Main activity

1. Students will watch Chapter 5 of *American Idealist*, “Idealism and the Peace Corps” (26:30–34:19). Transition from the warm-up activity to this clip by explaining that once Kennedy was elected president he recruited his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, to run the Peace Corps. (This material is covered in Chapter 4 of the film, “Politics and the Peace Corps.”) As students watch Chapter 5, ask them to record at least five ideas or facts that they learn about the Peace Corps.
2. Begin debriefing the film by asking each student to contribute one idea or fact from their notes. Students can add any new ideas to their list. By the end of this go-around, students should have recorded information that answers questions such as: “How many people volunteered to serve in the Peace Corps?”; “Where did they go?”; “What did they do in their host countries?” As students share information about where Peace Corps volunteers were sent, you can ask them to locate these countries on a map.
3. Once students have an understanding of the Peace Corps program, they are ready to think more deeply about what the program represents about public service. First, have students define the term *public service*, or you can refer them to this definition: *Public service—actions performed to benefit the community (local, national, or global), often supported or regulated by the government.* Then ask students to use their film notes to answer the question, “Is the Peace Corps a form of public service? Why or why not?” They can answer this question in small groups and then report their responses to the larger class.
4. Now students have the background knowledge to engage in a meaningful discussion about the purpose of public service. The “fishbowl” discussion structure, explained on the next page, gives students the opportunity to be active listeners and speakers. You can select your own question or quotation to guide the discussion, or you can allow students to begin by discussing what stood out to them in the film. If you prefer more structure, review “Handout 1: Fishbowl Discussion Preparation Sheet,” which includes three quotations from the film and related questions.

Follow-through

To synthesize ideas from this lesson, ask students to think about their own ideas and experiences with public service. This can be as simple as asking students to respond, in writing or in speaking, to the question, “Does everyone have the responsibility to perform public service?” At this time, you could also introduce the phrase *universe of responsibility: the individuals and groups we feel obligated to protect and support—the people about whom we care.* Students can identify the groups and individuals Sargent Shriver included

Guidelines for a Fishbowl Discussion

1. Make sure that students are prepared before the discussion begins. This typically means that students have had the opportunity to think and/or write about the topic for discussion.
2. Divide the class in half. Ask half of the class to move their chairs into a circle in the middle of the room. The other half of the class will stand outside of the circle.
3. Before beginning the discussion, review ground rules about how to participate in a respectful and thought-provoking conversation. For example, you might remind students about respectful listening and not interrupting the speaker. You can also review how to challenge each other's ideas without challenging the integrity of the person who said them.
4. Ask a student "in the fishbowl" to begin the discussion by sharing something that he or she wrote. It could be a question or a comment. If nobody responds, the facilitator (probably the teacher, but it could also be a student) can call on someone in the fishbowl to respond.
5. While students in the fishbowl are having a discussion, ask the students on the outside to record notes. You might ask them to record at least one idea they agree with, one idea that they disagree with, and one question that they have. Some teachers ask students to take notes on the process as well, recording data about who is speaking and how students are following the ground rules.
6. After approximately 15 minutes, students switch roles.

in his universe of responsibility. Watching the entirety of *American Idealist* will help students answer this question more thoroughly. Students can also identify the individuals and groups they include in their universe of responsibility.

Another way to help students consider their own ideas about public service is by having them express their opinion about statements such as:

- It is more important to serve in your local community than in other communities around the world.
- National or foreign service should be required of all citizens.
- Public service is as important today as it was during the 1960s.
- Young people are not as committed to public service today as they were during the 1960s.
- It is important that people define their universe of responsibility to include people who are different from themselves.

A "Four Corners Activity" provides a useful structure for a discussion about personal opinions. Label the four corners of the room with signs reading: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. Once students have had a few minutes to consider their personal response to the statements, read one of the statements aloud and ask students to move to the corner of the room that best represents their opinion. Once students are in their places, ask for volunteers to explain their position. Encourage students to switch corners if someone presents an idea that causes a change of mind. After a representative from each corner has defended his or her position, you can allow students to question

each others' evidence and ideas. This is an appropriate time to remind students about norms for listening carefully to each other and responding respectfully.

Assessment

- Handout 1: “Fishbowl Discussion Preparation Sheet” can be collected, along with students’ film notes.
- Students can write a brief essay in which they interpret one of the following quotations, explain if they agree with its message, and then share a personal connection to the ideas represented by the statement:

“Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”
— John F. Kennedy

“Built into each individual’s experience must be an occasion for giving, a task of humanity, an act of sharing and sacrifice.”
—Sargent Shriver

- Students can perform a brief speech in favor of or opposing the idea of a National Public Service program. They should refer to the ideas from the film in their speech.

Extensions

This lesson can be adapted for use with the viewing of the entirety of *American Idealist*. Before viewing the film, introduce students to the concept of universe of responsibility. As they watch the film, ask students to identify the individuals and groups Shriver includes in his universe of responsibility. After the film, students can create a visual representation of Shriver’s universe of responsibility. A culminating discussion can focus on questions such as, “What influenced how Shriver defined his universe of responsibility?” and “How did Shriver’s ideas about his universe of responsibility influence his actions?” Students can connect these ideas to themselves by creating a visual representation of their universe of responsibility.

Chapter 6 of *American Idealist* (“Timberlawn,” 34:19–37:19) describes how the Shriver family, particularly Eunice Shriver, founded the Special Olympics. Eunice Shriver explained, “My sister was mentally retarded . . . [but] did extremely well in sports. She was a very good swimmer and in these kinds of things she would come with us and be very much a part of the family. So I naturally was very adamant to get this kind of program for other children.” Watching this segment of the film provides students with a powerful example of how one’s universe of responsibility is shaped by personal experiences. It raises the question of how individuals develop an expansive sense of social responsibility if their experiences with those outside of their own group are limited. For more information about the Special Olympics refer to their website: www.specialolympics.org.

After this lesson, students might have questions about public service programs today. A research project might entail groups studying one of the following programs and then presenting information to the whole class:

- Peace Corps: www.peacecorps.gov
- Americorps: www.americorps.gov
- City Year: www.cityyear.org

They could also look into local service programs. Drawing from the information in these presentations, students can write an essay reflecting which of the programs appeals to them the most.

Many countries have compulsory military duty and/or civilian service. Indeed, the idea of a mandatory national service program has been debated in the United States for decades. You might ask students to do some research on this issue and participate in their own debate about mandatory public service. Groups of students might also propose models for national service programs.

There are multiple websites aimed at helping people, especially young people, serve the larger community. Students can review these sites and report on the kinds of issues young people appear to care about, based on the information from these sites. Questions you might use to guide a discussion about these websites include: “How many of the projects described on these sites represent local as opposed to national or global issues?” and “What do you learn from these websites about how youth are defining their universe of responsibility?” You can also use these sites as a vehicle to help students explore ways of performing public service around issues that matter to them. Facing History has developed Be the Change (www.facinghistory.org/BeTheChange), an interactive website that profiles the work of five human rights activists. The “What Can I Do?” section of this website includes an extensive list of online resources aimed at helping young people “choose to participate” by improving their communities—local, global, and national. Here is an example of four resources highlighted on the Be the Change “What Can I Do?” page:

- www.dosomething.org
- www.bethechange.org
- www.change.org
- www.takingitglobal.org

HANDOUT 1: Fishbowl Discussion Preparation Sheet

Directions: First, record thoughts or questions you have about the Peace Corps or other material in the film clip. Then, answer the questions following the quotations from the film *American Idealist*. This will prepare you to participate in a discussion about the Peace Corps and public service.

1. Thoughts or questions you have about the film, Peace Corps, or public service.

2. “In the last few months more applications for the Peace Corps have come to us than all the rest of the positions in the United States government put together.”
— John F. Kennedy

Why do you think so many people volunteered (and continue to volunteer) to serve in the Peace Corps?

3. “. . . of all our ideals none surpasses the importance of service. Peace Corps service is a practical way, in the words of John F. Kennedy, to convert our good words into good deeds. Our ideas into action—that’s what Kennedy promised America would do. Our greatness depends on it, not only practicing [it] here at home, but in the world at large.”
—Sargent Shriver

What does service mean? Do you think service is important? If so, to whom is it important?

4. “You want to be of consequence and this program [the Peace Corps] appeared to convey to people that they could be of consequence in a way that would help people around them, and in a way that would ultimately help themselves.”
—Sargent Shriver

What does it mean to be “of consequence”? Do you agree that you can help yourself by helping others?

LESSON 3

Participation through Public Policy

OVERVIEW

There are many ways individuals and groups choose to influence their communities. One way is through working with government to shape and manage public policy. In this lesson, students will study how public policy was used to fight poverty in the 1960s.

In 1964, 30 million Americans lived in poverty. As part of his Great Society program, President Lyndon Johnson launched a War on Poverty and asked Sargent Shriver to direct this effort. Speaking about the challenge facing Shriver, Scott Stossel, author of *Sarge: A Biography of Sargent Shriver*, remarked:

If a general was asked, you know, I want you to launch a war on Grenada, could you invade it and take it over, well you know that's something you can get your mind around. But, a war on poverty? That's like saying could you . . . for all intents and purposes, . . . wage war on gravity?¹

Undeterred by the daunting task of launching a War on Poverty, when asked if poverty could be wiped out, Shriver answered unequivocally, “Yes I do. Very bad health care, very bad schools. That kind of poverty doesn't need to exist today. It can be wiped out,” he argued.² In the beginning of this lesson, students will see a short clip from the film when Shriver is asked to direct the War on Poverty and then they will have the opportunity “to offer him” advice.

Like any war general, Shriver's decisions were guided by a coherent and explicit strategy. He firmly believed that the way to help people rise out of poverty was to help them help themselves. Professor James T. Fisher explains, “Shriver hated the idea of handouts, which he equated with what he called cheap grace—a kind of charity [that] does not empower people.”³ Describing his strategy for the War on Poverty, Shriver states, “This is no hand-out program. There are no giveaways in the War on Poverty. We're investing in human dignity, not in doles.”⁴ While Shriver expressed a belief that individuals are capable of getting themselves out of poverty, he also argued that it is the government's responsibility to provide services that help people in the effort to improve their lives. “Our idea was to discover ways in which people could be helped to help themselves,” he explained, thus outlining his strategy for leading the War on Poverty.⁵

One of the purposes of this lesson is to help students learn about different approaches to fighting poverty, and conducting public policy in general. The general population does not agree about the “proper” role for government and the individual when it comes to alleviating poverty. Most likely, your students' views will not share the same beliefs either. Thus, a conversation about approaches to fighting poverty must be grounded in rules about respectful discourse. For some students, a discussion about poverty may be abstract and intellectual, while for others it might be concrete and visceral. An open, respectful

¹ *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jamie Price, “Sargent Shriver and the War on Poverty Method in Social Change,” *Sargent Shriver Peace Institute* (2006). http://www.sargentshriver.com/4th_goal_project.html (accessed on May 23, 2008).

⁵ *Ibid.*

classroom climate provides the safest space for students to share their experiences, opinions, and questions about this important and sensitive topic.

Another goal of this lesson is to help students identify the tactics (or tools) Shriver used to support his strategy in the War on Poverty. For example, Shriver developed a variety of programs designed to help people use political institutions, education, and the justice system to reduce poverty in their own lives and in their communities. In the film *American Idealist*, we see how Shriver was able to secure federal funding and community support for his programs by listening to community members' needs, conducting thorough research about problems and solutions, and negotiating with legislators. By studying Shriver's tactics as director of the War on Poverty, students can discover tools they can apply to solving other problems.

American Idealist also documents some of the obstacles Shriver faced as director of the War on Poverty. Politicians, including mayors and senators, questioned the concept of giving funding directly to people in the community to run their own programs. They also were skeptical of the idea that legal action against government offices should be supported with federal dollars. Yet the most significant challenge to the War on Poverty came in the form of another war: the Vietnam War. President Lyndon B. Johnson decided that the Vietnam War was the nation's highest priority, and Congress allowed funding for the Office of Economic Opportunity to lapse. As a result, Shriver was forced to cancel several anti-poverty programs. Even though Shriver was ultimately able to convince Congress to restore much of the funding for his programs, he became increasingly aware that he would never be able to garner the investment needed to truly end poverty. With this realization in mind, Shriver retired as director of the War on Poverty in 1968.

In his four years as the leader of the War on Poverty, Shriver achieved many successes. According to *American Idealist*, "From 1964 to 1968, nearly one out of every three poor Americans left the poverty rolls. It was the largest four-year drop ever recorded."⁶ The film provides the following evidence documenting how the War on Poverty had begun to alleviate America's poverty problem:

- Head Start led to a revolution in early childhood education. Twenty-three million children have benefited from the program and thousands of women have used Head Start teaching as a pathway to enter the workforce.
- Community Action provided political training and pathways into public office and other positions of power for tens of thousands of blacks and Latinos.
- Legal Services invented the practice of poverty law. Its lawyers won hundreds of cases before the Supreme Court, thus advancing opportunities for the poor nationwide in education, employment, and housing.

Many of the programs Shriver started in the 1960s still help Americans today. Yet, how does one begin to evaluate success in a war on poverty? There are more poor people in the United States today than in 1964 when Shriver began his War on Poverty. In 2006, 36.5 million people, over 12 percent of the population of the United States, were classified as poor by the federal government.⁷ What is being done today to fight poverty? What

⁶ *American Idealist: The Story of Sargent Shriver*.

⁷ "Who Is poor?" *Institute for Research on Poverty*, University of Wisconsin–Madison, last updated September 7, 2007. <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/faqs/faq3.htm> (accessed on May 23, 2008).

are effective ways to reduce poverty? Who is ultimately responsible for participating in the War on Poverty? Studying the work of Sargent Shriver is one way to begin answering these important questions.

Goals

This lesson will help students:

- Describe several programs associated with the War on Poverty.
- Identify strategies and tactics Shriver used to get these programs implemented.
- Identify obstacles Shriver faced sustaining these programs.
- Define public policy.
- Consider different approaches to using public policy to fight poverty.

Duration

60 to 120 minutes

Materials

The specific excerpts from *American Idealist* referred to in this lesson can be viewed on the *American Idealist* movie website: <http://americanidealistmovie.org/videoClips2.htm>.

- Chapter 8: “How Do You Fight a War on Poverty?” (41:43–47:48).
- Chapter 9: “Community Action and the Politics of Poverty in the North” (47:48–55:20).
- Chapter 10: “Community Action and the Politics of Poverty in the South” (55:20–1:03).
- Chapter 11: “Vietnam vs. Poverty” (1:03–1:09).

Warm-up

In 1964, President Johnson asked Sargent Shriver to lead the War on Poverty. Before students learn about Shriver’s work fighting poverty, give them the opportunity to think about how they might approach a war on poverty. You can introduce this question by showing students a one-minute clip (42:11–43:15) from *American Idealist* that sets up Shriver’s challenge as director of the newly formed War on Poverty.

After showing this clip, students can suggest how to fight a war on poverty through a “chalk talk.” Write the question, “How do you fight poverty?” in the middle of a whiteboard, chalkboard, or large piece of paper. Then invite students to respond to this question by writing, not by talking. Make sure you have plenty of writing implements (chalk, pens, markers, etc.) so that many students can write at the same time. Students respond to each other’s ideas and questions by drawing a line connecting their thought to another student’s. A chalk talk often starts off slowly, so we suggest giving it at least five minutes to develop. As remarks are added, students have more thoughts to comment on and the pace of the chalk talk usually increases. Often a whole class might be standing at the board waiting for a turn to write.

Main activity

1. Inform students that in this lesson they will be watching excerpts from the film *American Idealist* that show how Sargent Shriver approached his job as director of the War on Poverty. The students’ task while watching excerpts from *American Idealist* is to identify Shriver’s strategy and tactics for fighting this *war*. Thus, before showing the film, make sure students understand the difference between a strategy and a tactic. You might explain this distinction through using the “war” metaphor. First, ask

students to comment on why they think President Johnson might have named this program the “War on Poverty.” Why did he use the word “war”? What feelings, images, and actions does this word bring up? Second, define the objective or mission of this war (i.e., to end poverty). Third, explain that just as military leaders have a war strategy, Shriver also had a strategy he used to guide his decisions. And just as military leaders employ tactics to support their strategy, Shriver implemented programs to support his strategy. Ask students to contribute examples of strategies and tactics from their own lives. Some of these examples are likely to come from the athletic field, where students regularly implement a particular tactic (move or play) to support a given strategy.

2. Distribute Handout 1: *American Idealist* Film Notes for Chapter 8 included with this lesson. Students should record information in the left column of the chart that will help them answer the following three questions:

- What was Shriver’s **strategy** for fighting poverty? (What was his theory for how to end poverty?)
- What **tactics** did he use? What specific programs did he introduce to fight poverty?
- What **obstacles** did he encounter?
- What were the **results** of his efforts as director of the War on Poverty?

The right-hand column is where students record questions or new vocabulary.

3. Chapters 8 through 11 of *American Idealist* chronicle Shriver’s decisions as director of the War on Poverty, from its inception to his decision to step down as the program’s director. Stop the film at the end of each chapter to give students the opportunity to discuss their notes, ask clarifying questions, and go over any unfamiliar vocabulary that might have been used in the clip. You can also use these moments between chapters as a time when students can connect to the material in the film on a more personal level. Students can share an idea they found interesting from the clip or something that has surprised them. After students watch these excerpts, they can meet in small groups to review their notes. You might also ask groups to use the information in their notes to answer the question, “Was Shriver’s War on Poverty a success?”

Follow-through

This section offers two ways to reinforce students’ understanding of Shriver’s decisions as director of the War on Poverty and to encourage students to think about how public policy should be used to solve social problems. The first activity focuses on analyzing different approaches to fighting poverty and the second activity focuses on the tools used to fight poverty.

Studying the War on Poverty is an appropriate opportunity to teach students about the concept of public policy. If you have not already introduced students to this concept, you can ask them to define it now. One way to do this is to break the word into two parts and then to put those parts together:

Public = not private, regulated by the government

Policy = laws, rules, and regulations

Public policy = laws and programs administered by the government

Students can identify examples of public policy they saw in the film or that they have experienced in their own lives. To make this concept more clear, you can ask students to think about policies that would not be classified as public, such as a family's rules for curfew or a business' policy about vacation days.

STRATEGIES FOR FIGHTING POVERTY

Barometer Activity

Shriver's main strategy for fighting poverty was to use public policy to help people help themselves. He believed that the government had a strong role to play in the War on Poverty, but he also believed that individuals, with the right support, could get themselves out of poverty. The following activity is designed to help students identify Shriver's strategy in the War on Poverty and refine their own ideas about who is responsible for alleviating poverty.

First post signs that state, "It is the responsibility of government to move people out of poverty," and "It is the responsibility of the individual to move out of poverty" at two ends of the room. Then ask students to stand at the place that they think represents Shriver's strategy for fighting the War on Poverty. Have students explain their positions, drawing on material from the film. Finally, ask students to stand at the spot that represents their own answer to this question.

An alternate way to do this activity is to distribute the handout "Strategies for Fighting Poverty." In small groups, ask students to mark the spot that represents Shriver's position along this continuum. The handout "Fighting the War on Poverty" includes selected quotations from *American Idealist* that will help students with this task. To help students share their responses with the whole class, you can draw a continuum on the board in a place where everyone can see it. Then have a member from each group plot their group's decision on this line and explain their group's decision.

TACTICS FOR FIGHTING POVERTY

A Toolbox for Change

Different strategies require different tools. Fighting a military battle often requires soldiers and weapons. What does fighting a war using public policy require? That is the question students will answer in this activity. Students, in groups or individually, will review their film notes to identify the "tools" (tactics) Shriver used to fight the war on poverty. For homework or as class work, students can make posters illustrating Shriver's "Toolbox for Change." Encourage students to think of tools both literally and figuratively. Specific programs such as Head Start and Legal Aid might be classified as tools to fight poverty. Shriver also used negotiation, optimism, and creativity when developing and getting funding for his programs. When designing their posters, students can cut out images from magazines or they can draw symbols to represent Shriver's tools. Students can complete this assignment as a written list, a sculpture, or a collection of objects.

Assessment

Students can create Shriver's "Toolbox for Change." (Read a description of this assignment in the follow-through section of the lesson.) They can explain their decisions about

what to include in this toolbox in an essay or an oral presentation. A final part of this assignment might ask students to personally connect to this material by answering questions such as, “If you could ‘wage war’ on a social problem, what would it be?”; “Why do you care about this problem?”; and “What tools would you use to solve this problem?”

Drawing on material from *American Idealist*, students could also write a brief essay outlining their own strategy for fighting poverty.

Extensions

When asked by a reporter, “Mr. Shriver, do you really believe that poverty can be wiped out?” Shriver answered without a moment’s hesitation, “Yes, I do.” Students can discuss what is being done today to fight poverty and whether or not they think it can be wiped out.

For more information about poverty and public policy, Public Agenda publishes a Poverty and Welfare Issue Guide (www.publicagenda.org) and the Institute for Research on Poverty (www.irp.wisc.edu/) offers current statistics as well as frequently asked questions about poverty. Students often wonder how poverty is measured. For information on how the United States Federal Government measures poverty, refer to this explanation from the U.S. Census Bureau website (www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/povdef.html). For information on how the United Nations and other organizations measure poverty internationally, refer to the report “What is Poverty? Measuring Poverty Internationally” published by Library Index (www.libraryindex.com).

In *American Idealist*, Scott Stossel, author of *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* (2004), asserts that Shriver has “probably had an effect on more Americans and more people across the world than anyone who hasn’t been a president or a world leader—and probably even more than some of them.” Students can learn more about Shriver’s influence and legacy by doing research on the following programs that Shriver helped develop during his decades as a public servant.

Programs Related to the War on Poverty

- National Legal Aid and Defender Association: www.nlada.org
- Vista: www.americorps.org/about/programs/vista.asp
- National Head Start Association: www.nhsa.org
- National Community Action Foundation: www.ncaf.org
- Job Corps: www.jobcorps.dol.gov

Other Programs

- Peace Corps: www.peacecorps.gov
- Special Olympics: www.specialolympics.org

According to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care.”⁸ In other words, an adequate standard of living is considered to be a human right by the international legal

⁸ <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

community. Students can discuss whether they agree that access to food, clothing, housing, and medical care should be considered a human right. If access to an adequate standard of living is a human right, then what should happen when children, women, and men have been denied this right by matter of government policy, natural disaster, or inequality? Who is responsible for alleviating poverty? The concept of “universe of responsibility” is introduced in Lesson 2. It refers to the individuals and groups we feel obligated to protect and support—the people about whom we care. This concept can also be used to frame a discussion about who is responsible for alleviating poverty.

Before his death, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized poverty as a violation of civil rights. He helped organize the Poor People’s Campaign of 1968 to draw attention to what he called the second phase of the civil rights struggle. While the first phrase represented developing a national awareness of the injustice of segregation, the second phase of the civil rights struggle focused on the factors limiting the achievements of all Americans, especially poor Americans. As an extension to this lesson, students can discuss why Dr. King linked civil rights and poverty. The *Eyes on the Prize* television series, Episode 10, “The Promised Land,” focuses on the Poor People’s Campaign. Facing History and Ourselves has written a study guide to accompany *Eyes on the Prize*. The study guide includes a pamphlet used to attract support for the Poor People’s Campaign and an excerpt from Dr. King’s “Mountaintop Speech” delivered in Memphis on April 3, 1968, one day before his assassination. In this speech, Dr. King asserts, “God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can’t eat three square meals a day,”⁹ revealing how his struggle for civil rights grew into a struggle for economic rights. Sargent Shriver’s relationship to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement is addressed in *American Idealist* in Chapter 2, “The Start of a New Era.”

⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “I See the Promised Land,” Memphis, TN, April 23, 1968. <http://seto.org/king3.html> (accessed on May 23, 2008).

HANDOUT 1: *American Idealist* Film Notes on Chapter 8

Film notes	Questions and vocabulary
<p>What was Shriver's strategy for fighting poverty? What was his theory for how to end poverty?</p> <p>What tactics did he use? What specific programs did he introduce to fight poverty?</p> <p>What obstacles did he encounter?</p>	

HANDOUT 2: Barometer Activity: Strategies for Fighting Poverty

Directions: Mark the spot that represents Shriver's approach to fighting poverty. Then explain your answer.

It is the responsibility of government to move people out of poverty.



It is the responsibility of the individual to move out of poverty.

Explanation:

Extension: Where would you place yourself along this continuum?

HANDOUT 3: Shriver's Thoughts on the War on Poverty

Quotations from the Film *American Idealist*

Sargent Shriver: "You have to have that sense of human respect and dignity and equality before these other specific programs like a health program or an educational program could have its maximum effect."

Shriver describing his plan for the War on Poverty: "It's not a program of federal handouts to alleviate poverty."

Prof. James T. Fisher describing Shriver's approach to fighting poverty: "Shriver hated the idea of handouts which he equated with what he called cheap grace—a kind of charity which does not empower people."

Shriver describing one of his programs in the War on Poverty: "Community Action, as its name implies, is local action. We depend completely on local communities to come to Washington with their own programs of combating poverty, in ways that they see fit to do it, in their own hometown."

Laura McEnaney describing Community Action, one of Shriver's programs in the War on Poverty: "From the perspective of the activists themselves it's an opening, it's a voice, it's an opportunity and it's a stepping-stone for them to get their issues heard and to finally get the city to pay attention and do something about their problems."

Shriver justifying the Legal Aid program: "The poor need and deserve the same quality of legal services that the profession owes to all citizens."

Shriver describing the value of Legal Aid: "We're creating life at the community level, and when you've got life, you've got movement, you've got dissension, you've got action, that's what you want."

Shriver, venting his frustration at not getting adequate funding for his programs while the United States spent its resources on fighting a war in Vietnam: "I think it would be a gross deception to delude the American people that something substantial is being done about problems here at home, such as lack of education, lack of health, lack of justice, lack of housing, lack of opportunity. To delude them that something is being done about that when you appropriate so little money that you can't do something substantial about it."