

4.9

Public Service as a Career

Standard 4.9: Public Service as a Career

Explain the importance of public service and identify career and other opportunities in public service at the local, state and national levels. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.9]

FOCUS QUESTION: What Are Students' Career Opportunities in Public Service?



[2016 National Park Service Proof Half Dollar](#)
Public Domain

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Adults are constantly asking young people this question as if teens and tweens could easily answer it. Far less often are children asked if they want a career in public services which involve jobs and roles “offered or controlled by a government” ([Spacey, 2019, para. 1](#)).

Imagining themselves in the future, many youngsters say they want to be famous. But fame is an elusive concept, not easily achieved. To calculate the odds of fame, one mathematician divided the number of living people with a Wikipedia page by the world's total population of over 7 billion and found that one's likelihood of fame was 0.0086% ([The Fraction of Famous People in the World](#), *Wired*, January 22, 2013).

When asked about their dream job, younger children tend to say to want to be a dancer, actor,

musician, teacher, scientist, or athlete ([Top 15 Kids' Dream Jobs](#), May 2020). College students have dream jobs too, but tend to recognize there are the practical choices to be made between one's desires, the costs of higher education, and what jobs and careers will generate a living salary. Questions such as "If college were free to everyone, who would go?" and "If every job paid the same, would your dream job be different?" provoke wide-ranging responses from teenagers and college students alike.

Amazon is country's fastest-growing employer, only Walmart has a larger workforce. But are Amazon jobs good jobs for workers? Working at Amazon is akin to the industrial factory jobs of the past - it's an option for high school or community college graduates who lack specific professional, managerial, or technical skills. While jobs in Amazon warehouses pay \$15 an hour, they are physically demanding, often dangerous, and psychologically isolating as workers spend large amounts of their work day interacting mainly with robots.

We live in a time of rapid technological and social change that makes planning for future life and career uncertain. Many new jobs will require at least some postsecondary education. Instead of deciding on a single career in high school or college, today's graduates are much more likely to change jobs than earlier generations. [The Bureau of Labor Statistics \(2019\)](#) reported that workers born between 1957 and 1964 had an average of 12.3 jobs between ages 18 and 52, although many of those jobs were in the same career field.

Watch "[Squiggly](#)" [Careers and the End of the Traditional Path](#), a TED Talk about how the longstanding idea of a career ladder, where one moves steadily upward in one job or field, is being replaced by individuals charting their own paths through many different work choices.



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-IVj>

Adding to the uncertainty of the future, there are an **untold numbers of careers that have not**

even been created yet. According to the [World Economic Forum \(2016\)](#), "A projected 65% of children entering grade school will work in jobs that do not exist today" (p. 6). Just ten years ago, who would have thought of becoming a digital marketing specialist, an app developer, a podcast producer, a data scientist, an online content moderator, or a telemedicine physician? As such, [ISTE, the International Society for Technology in Education \(2016\)](#), urges educators to use technology to "amplify and even transform teaching and learning" (p. 2). To do so enables students to learn the skills of communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, which are necessary for success in the dynamic and changing workforce of today.

Young people should focus on careers where they **can do what they love to do**, recommended the authors of a special section of the *New York Times Magazine for Kids* (Craig, 2020, p. 6-7). Their "What Should You Be When You Grow Up" chart displayed current and future careers in six broad categories: 1) Move your body and travel; 2) Create new things and travel; 3) Get hands dirty and move your body; 4) Help people and get your hands dirty; 5) Help people and learn how the world works; and 6) Learn how the world works and create new things.

What are career opportunities in public service? The modules for this topic explore working for local, state, and federal government, including becoming a teacher.

Modules for this Standard Include:

1. [INVESTIGATE: Working for Local, State, and Federal Government](#)
[MEDIA LITERACY CONNECTIONS: Recruiting Workers for Public Sector Jobs](#)
2. [UNCOVER: A Short History of American Public Education](#)
3. [ENGAGE: Is Teaching a Career for You?](#)
[MEDIA LITERACY CONNECTIONS: Images of Teachers and Teaching](#)

1. INVESTIGATE: Working for Local, State, and Federal Government

Public services include people and organizations in **Government and Diplomacy** (elected officials, agency workers, diplomats), **Education and Teaching** (public school teachers, school administrators), **Public Safety** (police officers, firefighters, health workers), **Non-Profit Organizations**, and **Environment and Conservation**.

Approximately **15% of all jobs are in the public sector**, although the number varies from state to state and can be as high as 25% of the labor force.

More than 2 million people work for the United States Federal Government:

- In the armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard);
- In the Departments of State, Defense, Labor, Energy, Agriculture, Labor, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Education, Commerce, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, and the Post Office;
- In federal agencies including the Social Security Administration, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Census Bureau, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and more.

Millions more people work in state and local governments as teachers, police officers, firefighters, and health and human service personnel. While there are fewer public sector jobs than private sector jobs, many public sector jobs pay more than the national average of \$905 a week or \$47,060 a year. Public service jobs have good benefits and there is a sense that one is working for the betterment of society.

You can read a more complete overview at [What Are Public Sector Jobs and Are They Right for You?](#)

Media Literacy Connections: Recruiting Workers for Public Sector Jobs

State and local governments are currently experiencing enormous challenges in recruiting workers for public sector jobs. An ongoing “**silver tsunami**” (the steady retirement of older baby boom-age workers) combined with a decline in job applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant number of public sector employment openings throughout the country. And, the public sector is facing increasingly stiff competition from the private sector organizations for highly talented professional, managerial, and technical workers, especially those with two- and four-year college degrees.

In these activities, you will design a job recruitment commercial and social media post to influence others to pursue careers in the public sector.

- [Activity 1: Design a Public Sector Job Recruitment Commercial](#)
- [Activity 2: Post About Public Sector Jobs on Social Media](#)

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Create a Low Wage Workers Infographic**
 - 53 million people (44% of all workers) earn low wages: A person making \$10.22 an hour will earn about \$24,000 a year ([A Closer Look at Low-Wage Workers Across the Country](#), Brookings, March 2020).
 - What information about low-wage workers did you find by examining the Brookings site?
 - Design an infographic to present your findings.
- **Evaluate Your Employability Skills**
 - Conduct research and identify the top 10 skills that are beneficial in public sector jobs.
 - [21st Century Skills: Developing Today’s Public Sector Workforce](#)
 - [The 21st Century Public Servant](#)
 - [The 21st-century public servant needs new skills](#)
 - Assess your level of strength for each skill on the list.
 - Identify at least one way to improve one or more of your employability skills.

2. UNCOVER: A Short History of American Public Education

"Educate and inform the whole mass of the people," Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787, adding: "Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them. And it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty" (quoted in [From Thomas Jefferson to Uriah Forrest with Enclosure, 31 December 1787](#)).

Jefferson was expressing what has become a long-standing American ideal that going to school and getting an education under the guidance of dedicated teachers is essential to the successful functioning of a democratic society. Without knowledge, the people cannot govern. Jefferson also believed the government had a vital role in providing that education. What is distinctive of the United States, noted Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835, "it is by the attention it pays to Public Education" (2002, p. 23). It is through education "that the original character of American civilization is at once placed in the clearest light" (2002, p. 31).

Early Schooling

But history shows that the United States has not always sought to educate every person nor has teaching been highly valued as a public service. The earliest public schools were in Puritan New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire). They were "small, their curriculum uniform, and their students homogeneous" (Axell, 1974, pp. 286-287). They focused on teaching religious values and learning from the Bible. Besides the Bible, the first book used in schools was [The New England Primer](#) which introduced each alphabet letter in a religious phrase and then illustrated the phrase with a woodcut.

The [Boston Latin School](#), founded in 1635, is the oldest school in America; the [Roxbury Latin School](#), the oldest school in continuous operation in North America was founded in 1645. Four years later, Harvard was established as the first American college. In 1657, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring a community of 50 or more families to hire a schoolteacher. However, the concept of public education in Puritan New England did not spread; private schooling was the norm throughout the colonies.

From early colonial times to the late 18th century, most school teachers were men in their 20s, many of whom used teaching as a stepping-stone to careers in law or the church. Women ran "[Dame Schools](#)" in their homes for young children. Women in rural areas managed groups of students during the summer when men were farming. Schools were only open a few months of the year when children were not needed to work at home or in the fields.

The Common School

The nature and structure of schools and teaching began to change in the 1820s and 1830s with the arrival of the [Common School](#), an early version of today's public school. Massachusetts education reformer [Horace Mann](#) (1796-1859) saw common schools as the means to provide a system of free, universal, non-religious-based schooling. These schools would be funded by taxes and special fees paid by parents and would provide education for all children, regardless of religion or social class. These schools would teach basic literacy and arithmetic and a philosophy of democratic citizenship. The emergence of common schools created the need for more teachers, and to meet this demand, women were hired, although paid one-third of their male counterparts. By the 1850s, a majority of the nation's teachers were women. Today, about four out of five teachers are women ([Loewus, 2017](#)).

Education for African Americans

From the outset, education for African Americans was blocked first by the system of slavery and then by institutional segregation and White racism. South Carolina passed the first law prohibiting the education of slaves in 1740 following the Stono slave rebellion. Many other southern states passed similar laws banning education for slaves. During the years before the Civil War, a small number of slaves would learn to read and write in secret from other educated slaves, or from 'benevolent' slave

owners or slave owning family members. [Frederick Douglass describes in his memoir how he learned to read and write during his time as a slave.](#)

After the Civil War, many educators promoted education for former slaves and their children, and schools were set up for African American children. But these schools faced the immense challenges of poor funding, lack of proper resources, and the ever-present threat of violence from White community members.

Shaping the life experiences of Blacks were [Jim Crow laws](#), oppressive policies instituted by white southerners designed to restrict the rights and opportunities (including education) of African Americans by segregating Blacks and Whites while Whites maintained access to institutions of power and control. The Supreme Court's 1896 [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) decision made racial segregation constitutional, establishing the doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land until it was overturned by the 1954 [Brown v. Board of Education](#) decision.

School Integration

The struggle to integrate public schools before and after the *Brown v. Board* decision includes some of the most compelling stories of the 20th century Civil Rights Movement. In 1951, a 16-year-old girl, [Barbara Rose Johns](#) led a student strike to protest the substandard educational facilities at her all-Black high school in Prince Edward County, Virginia.



New York City Mayor Robert Wagner greeting the Little Rock Nine, the teenagers who integrated Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas
["Robert F. Wagner with Little Rock students NYWT"](#) | Public Domain

The [Little Rock Nine](#) were a group of African American students who enrolled in Little Rock Arkansas Central High School in 1957. The state's White segregationist governor deployed National Guard soldiers to block the students from attending classes until President Dwight Eisenhower, yielding to pleas from Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil right leaders, sent in troops from the Army's 101st Airborne Division to ensure that the students could go to school.

[Ruby Bridges](#) was only six-years-old and living in New Orleans when she became the first Black student to attend a previously all-White elementary school in the Southern United States. Four

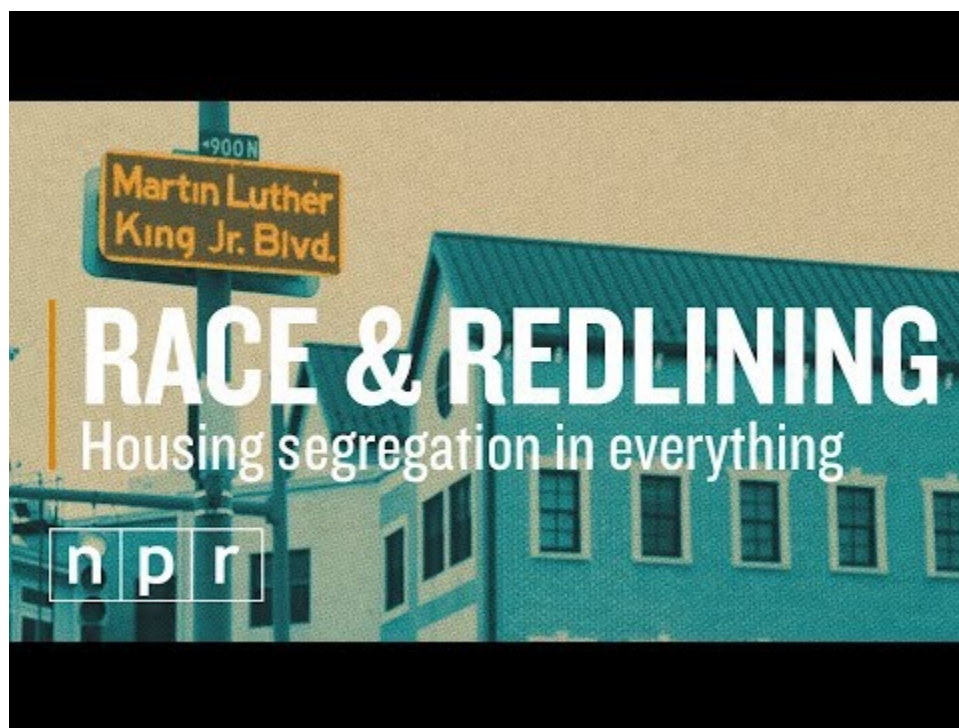
federal marshalls accompanied her to school everyday for an entire school year where she was the only student in her class.

Impacts of Redlining and Housing Segregation on Education

Even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, school integration was stymied by the practice of redlining. **Redlining** refers to the discriminatory practice of withholding home loan or home insurance funds from buyers in certain areas of a city (outlined on maps in red). Mortgage lenders redlined areas (predominantly low-income African American neighborhoods) where they did not want to make loans.

Redlining as a formal practice began with the [National Housing Act of 1934](#). It served to prevent African Americans from home ownership and helped create communities where people from different races lived and went to school in isolation from one another. It was not made illegal till the [Fair Housing Act, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968](#).

Learn more at a wiki page [Redlining and Housing Segregation Against African Americans](#) and watch the [NPR video: Housing Segregation In Everything](#).



[Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-DFZu](https://edtechbooks.org/-DFZu)

Today, in 21st century America, Black students continue to face racial bias in every aspect of the educational system. Black students are more likely to attend under-resourced public schools; score lower than White students on standardized tests; graduate from high school and from college at lower rates than Whites; are subject to higher rates of disciplinary action and school suspensions and are more likely to be placed in special education classes than other students. Housing segregation produced by redlining restricts Black families to poor neighborhoods where most schools lack the resources to provide a quality education for all students.

Divisive Concept Laws, Critical Race Theory, and Teachers' First Amendment Rights

Following the 2021 Presidential election, a number of Republican-controlled states began adopting laws to restrict what they deemed the teaching of “**divisive concepts**” to students in K-12 classrooms. These laws are intended to regulate or control how teachers talk with students about issues of race, sex, ethnicity, color, and national origin on the grounds that such discussions can be upsetting and divisive.

According to [New Hampshire House Bill 544 \(HB 544\)](#), “Divisive concept” means the concept that:

- (a) One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
- (b) The state of New Hampshire or the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist;
- (c) An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
- (d) An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex;
- (e) Members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
- (f) An individual’s moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex;
- (g) An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
- (h) Any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex; or
- (i) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist, or were created by a particular race to oppress another race.
- (j) The term “divisive concepts” includes any other form of race or sex stereotyping or any other form of race or sex scapegoating.
- III. “Race or sex stereotyping” means ascribing character traits, values, moral and ethical codes, privileges, status, or beliefs to a race or sex, or to an individual because of his or her race or sex.
- IV. “Race or sex scapegoating” means assigning fault, blame, or bias to a race or sex, or to members of a race or sex because of their race or sex. It similarly encompasses any claim that, consciously or unconsciously, and by virtue of his or her race or sex, members of any race are inherently racist or are inherently inclined to oppress others, or that members of a sex are inherently sexist or inclined to oppress others.”

Many of these laws follow a common template developed by conservative political organizations.

Numerous divisive concept laws seek to ban the teaching of **critical race theory** in public schools. Critical race theory has been primarily used in higher education as a framework for analyzing the historical and contemporary impacts of racism in the U.S. legal system. Focusing on critical race theory, legislatures have sought to “generally prohibit schools from teaching that one race or sex is inherently superior, that any individual is consciously or unconsciously racist or sexist because of their race or sex, and that anyone should feel discomfort or guilt because of their race or sex” ([Education Week](#), June 10, 2021, para. 12).

Education and public policy organizations have condemned divisive concept measures, citing how the vagueness of the laws will produce a “chilling” effect on how history and contemporary politics can

be taught in schools. Can a school celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and discuss the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision? What about the nation's long history of slavery, segregation, and the struggles of African Americans to achieve equal rights under the law? Or, Ida B. Wells, Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party? Will students be allowed to examine Helen Keller's political views and activism or just her efforts to overcome disability?

Divisive concept laws with sweeping mandates about what can and cannot be taught in K-12 classrooms raise the issue of First Amendment rights for teachers in schools. What can a teacher say in the classroom? How tightly can the state or local government regulate what teachers teach? Analyzing the competing interests raised by such questions, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit in Cincinnati stated in [Evans-Marshall v. Tipp City Exempted Village School District](#) (2010):

“On the one side, doesn't a teacher have the First Amendment right to choose her own reading assignments, decide how they should be taught and above all be able to teach a unit on censorship without being censored or otherwise retaliated against?” the court said. “On the other side, doesn't a school board have the final say over what is taught, and how, in the public schools for which it is responsible? Who wins depends on which line of legal authority controls” (quoted in [Education Week](#), June 10, 2021, para. 30).

Basically, the courts have decided that teachers are in a special category where **they have both First Amendment speech rights and limitations on those rights** ([Rights of Teachers](#), The First Amendment Encyclopedia, 2017).

There is a sharp distinction between the First Amendment speech protections for college professors as opposed to K-12 classroom teachers. In a 1967 case, [Keyishian v. Board of Regents](#), faculty members from the State University of New York faced dismissal or not being rehired for refusing to sign a statement that they were not and had never been Communists; a non-faculty employee also faced dismissal for refusing to say whether he had ever been a member of a group that advocated the forceful overthrow of the government. Citing the vagueness of the New York statute, the Court ruled in favor of the professors, overturning the law while stating “academic freedom is a special concern of the First Amendment which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom.”

Unlike college faculty, K-12 teachers can be **restricted in what they say in the course of their official job duties**. In [Garcetti v. Ceballos](#) (2006), the Supreme Court ruled that public employees generally do not have First Amendment protection for their on-the-job speech. Then in a 2010 banned book case, [Evans-Marshall v. Tipp City Exempted Village School District](#), the U.S. Court of Appeals used *Garcetti* as a precedent and declared “the First Amendment does not extend to the in-class curricular speech of teachers in primary and secondary schools” ([Education Week](#), June 10, 2021, para. 31).

How will the courts rule on divisive concept laws? What about the court of public opinion? Can families and educators mount sufficient protests to prevent passage of similar laws in more states or possibly the removal of them where they are already passed?

For a historical view of another education controversy about what teachers can teach and students should learn, visit [The Scopes Trial and the Debate over Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species](#).

Additional Resources

- [What Critical Race Theory Is and What it Means for Teachers](#) (Teaching Tolerance)

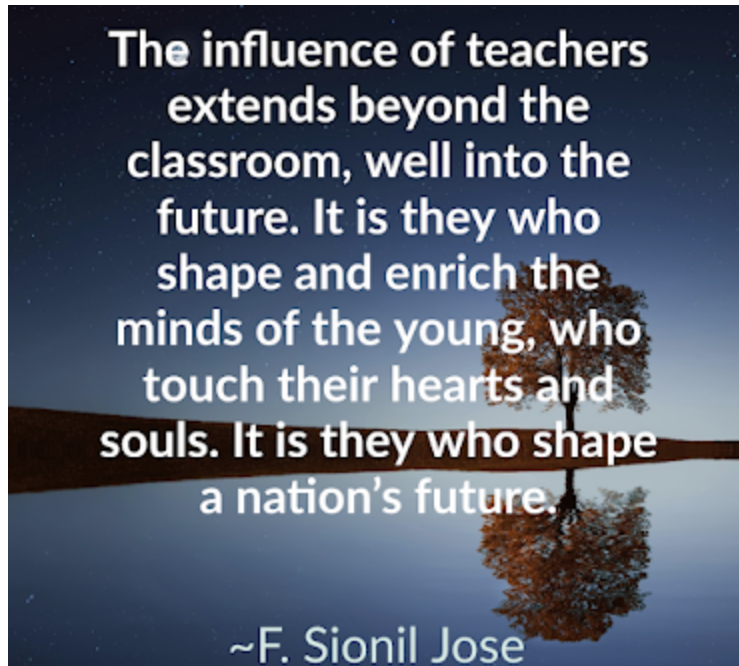
Suggested Learning Activities

- **Write a People's History of School Integration**
 - [April 23, 1951: 16-Year-Old Barbara Johns Leads a Student Strike](#)
 - [The Little Rock Nine](#)
 - [After 50-Year Legal Struggle, Mississippi School District Ordered to Desegregate](#), NPR (May 17, 2016)
- **Civic Action for School Improvement**
 - Identify at least one way to improve the educational experiences of Black students in schools today.
 - Create a PSA or write a letter to a local or national elected official to convince others to implement your idea.

3. ENGAGE: Is Teaching a Career for You?

[Christa McAuliffe](#), the astronaut who was also a high school social studies teacher once said, “**I touch the future, I teach.**” Her quote frames teaching as a career that matters.

Through teaching, adults engage students in developing their talents as learners, creators, thinkers, and doers who can shape their futures with the knowledge and skills they gain in school. Effective teachers are major keys to the success of students in schools at all grade levels.



School enrollments in the United States are continuing to increase. In fall 2019, 50.8 million public school students attended prekindergarten through grade 12, and that figure is projected to surpass 52 million by 2027.

American schools now enroll a majority of minority students. In 2019, there were 23.7 million White students and 27.1 million non-White students, distributed as followed: 7.7 million Black students, 13.9 million Hispanic students, 2.7 million Asian students, 0.2 Pacific Islander students, 0.5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 2.1 million students of two or more races ([Bustamante, 2019](#)).

All these students need teachers. There were 3.7 million teachers in fall 2019 ([Bustamante, 2019](#)) and that number is projected to rise to 3.9 million by 2027. But many observers believe there is a current and growing teacher shortage. The Economic Policy Institute forecast a shortage of some 200,000 teachers by 2025 ([Garcia & Weiss, 2019](#)).

Teachers have been at the center of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In late August, 2020, the Trump Administration's Department of Homeland Security [declared teachers are essential workers](#), joining other public and private sector employees in areas such as medicine, energy, transportation, agriculture, and retail who provide services that are crucial to the nation's health and economy ([Who Are Essential Workers?](#) Economic Policy Institute, May 19, 2020).

Is teaching a possible career choice for you?

Media Literacy Connections: Images of Teachers and Teaching

Conventional images of teachers also seem resistant to change. In a study comparing the drawings of teachers by college undergraduates, student teaching interns, and practicing teachers, the undergraduates tended to display a teacher at the front of the classroom with students sitting in rows passively listening, while student teaching interns drew students rather than adults at the center of the learning process, and practicing teachers drew more teacher-centered scenes that showed frustration and unhappiness on the part of the adults ([Sinclair, et.al., 2013](#)). What is happening that might explain these different visions of teaching and teachers?

In these activities, you will first design an interactive image of a teacher in a 21st century school before evaluating images of teachers taken from different media sources over the past 100 years. As you engage in these activities, consider: "How do you think images of teaching might impact how students in K-12 schools think about teaching and education as a possible career choice?"

- [Activity 1: Design an Interactive Image of a 21st Century Teacher](#)
- [Activity 2: Evaluate Images of American Teachers](#)

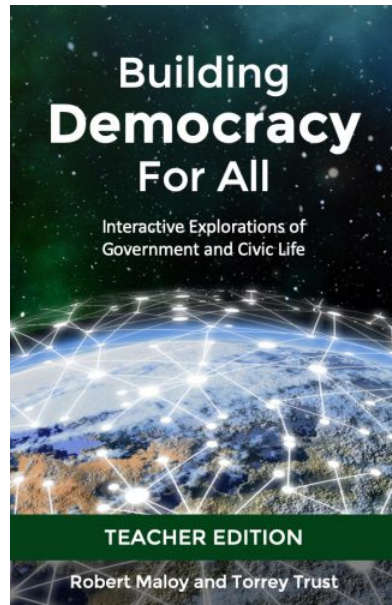
Suggested Learning Activities

- **Envision a Dream Job and Your Career Plans**
 - If you could do anything you want to do, what would be your dream job?
 - Compare your dream job with those of children: [Kids Dream Jobs](#)
 - Were any of the children's choices the same as your when you were in elementary or middle school?
 - How close do your career plans relate to your dream job?
- **Analyze Job Market Trends and Realities**
 - Choose 3 jobs from the list of occupation groups and assess how much money people earn in different jobs and occupations using information from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
 - What did you learn? What surprised you?
 - In what fields do you think workers should be making more money and why?
- **Think and Act as a Teacher**
 - Listen to the audio and read the text for an NPR podcast [One Teacher's Quest to Build Language Skills ... And Self-Confidence](#)
 - The podcast describes how Mr. Whaley heightens 2nd graders' self-confidence by enhancing their self-image as highly capable achievers. He does this for ESL students and native English speakers.
 - What three strategies is he doing to help students believe in themselves as successful learners.
 - What other strategies would you adopt if you were the teacher in the classroom?
- **Design a School Where You Want to Teach**
 - Consider the following questions:
 - What aspects of school curriculum interest you and propel your learning in

- academic classes?
 - What three methods of classroom instruction by teachers best support you as a learner?
 - What have been your experiences learning with technology in schools?
 - Was technology used by teachers in ways that were interesting to you? Why or why not?
- In groups, design a school that you would like to work at.
- **Teacher Twitter**
 - Review this article and interview on "[Twitter for Teachers](#)". Visit some of the Twitter hashtags and educators listed until you get a feel for Twitter's teacher community. Then, choose between the following tasks.
 - Find 5 education-related accounts that are not listed here that think would be valuable to a teacher.
 - Find 5 education-related hashtags that are not listed here that think would be valuable to a teacher.
 - Reply to 3 tweets within a listed chat (in real-time, or not) and share your thoughts.
- **High Demand Public Jobs**
 - Explore this site of [federal jobs in high demand](#). Choose one from the list and create an infographic that includes:
 - A job description and common tasks within this job
 - The average job wage/salary
 - Educational requirements to meet job requirements

Standard 4.9 Conclusion

Public service careers including working in government, education, law enforcement and public safety, non-profit organizations, and environment and conservation. **INVESTIGATE** discussed working for local, state, and federal government. **UNCOVER** examined the history of American public schooling. **ENGAGE** asked whether teaching is a career for you.



Maloy, R. W. & Trust, T. (2020). *Building Democracy for All*. EdTech Books.
<https://edtechbooks.org/democracy>