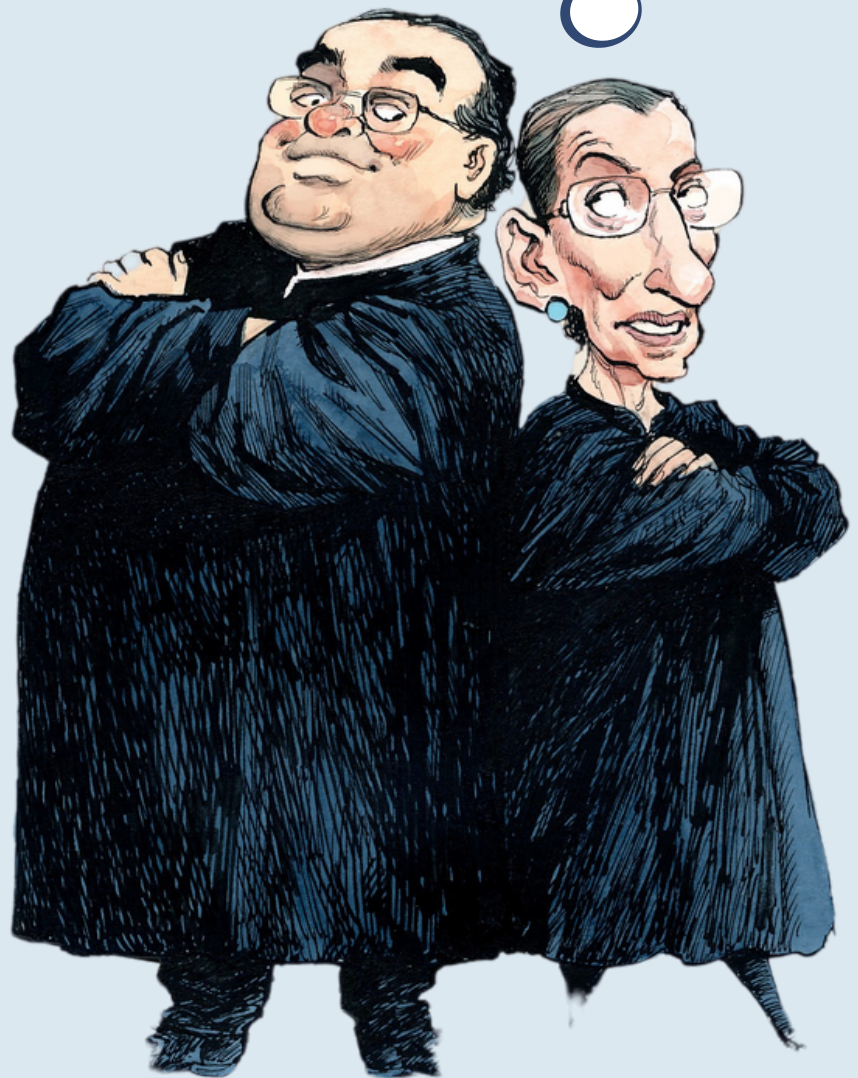


# Colorado Unify Challenge Lesson Plan Series



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# Overview

[The Colorado Unify Challenge](#) was a live, one-on-one online conversation (like Zoom) between Coloradans from across the state who often have very different outlooks on issues. The Challenge was designed to help Coloradans recognize that they have more in common than the headlines might suggest. These conversations were not debates, but rather were invitations to have a productive, frank conversation between Coloradans to find common ground and talk about issues Colorado faces.

The Challenge was part of Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser's [Ginsburg-Scalia Initiative](#). The initiative is an effort to develop and celebrate the norm of respectful dialogue, while emphasizing listening and learning from different points of view, and collaborative problem-solving.

This guide provides the tools for a high school teacher to bring the Colorado Unify Challenge and related lessons about civil discourse into high schools in a form suited for the classroom. It consists of an introductory activity exploring political socialization, namely the influences that shape our political views; a guide to structure the viewing and discussion of a documentary about the Challenge; and directions for conducting an in-class small-group deliberation on one of three issues explored in the documentary.

## **Activity Time Frame**

Depending on which activities you choose to use and how deeply you want to engage students, you may spend anywhere from four to six 50-minute class periods teaching the material in the guide.

## Letter from Attorney General Weiser

We all have seen it: our politics today are filled with rising misinformation, polarization, and demonization.. Too often, interactions begin by questioning the good will or motives of those who might see things differently, rather than starting with empathy, curiosity, and humility. We can do better with more questions like “what leads you to see this issue that way?” rather than “when did you become an idiot?”

I believe a return to one of the central values of our constitutional republic—engaging in respectful dialogue—has the power to produce a fundamental shift away from demonization and towards respectful engagement across difference. Doing this work to heal our democratic republic has never been more important.

The Ginsburg/Scalia Initiative led by the Attorney General’s Office seeks to encourage a return to these fundamental values. Building off the success of the Unify Challenge for Colorado, where we brought together Coloradans from across the state to discuss, one-on-one, some of the most pressing issues of our time, we are excited to announce the next chapter of this Initiative. To advance this work, we have developed this series of lesson plans for high school teachers to bring the Unify Challenge and related lessons about civil discourse into the classroom. The lesson plans provide tools for students to navigate difficult conversations around difference, while emphasizing the importance of building authentic relationships, listening to others, and learning from alternative points of view.

I believe the next generation of leaders has the potential to break from the divisiveness we see today and approach difference with curiosity rather than animosity. By seeking out open and honest conversations, these leaders can help us shape a new collective narrative that is defined by solidarity and collaborative problem solving.

The Attorney General’s Office is committed to continuing about how we heal our democratic republic and respond to the division in our society. I am excited for sustained engagement from community members across our state in this conversation, as we work to put the needs, hopes, and promise of all Coloradans ahead of our political differences.



Colorado Attorney General

## Goals/Objectives

The overarching goal of this high school version of the Colorado Unify Challenge and related lesson plans is to build students' ability to discuss issues across differences and to develop the skills necessary to find common ground with those having different perspectives. As a result of participating in the activities in this guide, students will be able to:

- Better understand why they hold the political views they do.
- Draw conclusions about factors that improve the quality of discussions among those who disagree.
- Explain why being able to discuss issues with those who disagree with them is an important skill for members of a community.
- Identify arguments representing various perspectives on a controversial issue.
- Represent an assigned perspective and their own point of view in discussing a controversial issue.
- Recognize the complexity of political viewpoints and respect views different from their own.
- Find common ground with people holding different views.



# Components

## Components of the Colorado Unify Challenge for High School Students Lesson Plan Series

This document contains three lesson plans:

1. **Political Background Lesson Plan.** Students walk through a series of questions to help them understand what has influenced their political viewpoints. They are then instructed to prepare a graphic (a political background tree) that creates a visualization of the influences on their political viewpoints. In better understanding what shapes their political viewpoints, they will learn to challenge their own assumptions about others' viewpoints. (100 min)
2. **Documentary Viewing Guide.** After a brief introduction to the Colorado Unify Challenge and the purpose of the documentary, students use demographic information about the participants in the documentary to make predictions about their political views. They then watch the documentary, available [here](#), using a Viewing Guide to record responses and observations. Finally, they take part in a discussion of the documentary, focusing on what they learned and found interesting in observing the characters in the documentary talking with those that they disagree. (50 min)
3. **Small Group Structured Discussions.** Students read about one of three issues covered in the documentary – affordable housing, parental control over what their children learn in school, or red flag gun laws – and identify arguments on both sides of the issue. They are then assigned one of four identities (i.e., people with different political perspectives) and participate in a small-group discussion, arguing from the perspective of their assigned identity. Finally, they then transition to discussing the issue from their own point of view. (50-100 minutes)
4. **Additional Resources.** The guide ends with lists of additional resources, including resources on Colorado issues, discourse, and teaching controversial issues.



# Lesson Plan 1

## Political Background and Influences

Background:

In this lesson students will take a [poll](#) that walks through a series of questions about the experiences that may have shaped their political views. Students then prepare a graphic (a political backgrounds tree) that documents these influences and highlights how these influences may have shaped the political viewpoints of the student.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Understand the influences that shape political viewpoints.
- Describe factors shaping their own political viewpoints.

[CO Academic Standards & Essential Skills](#) Covered in this Lesson Plan

**High School, Standard 4. Civics: Prepared Graduates:** 7. Express an understanding of how civic participation affects policy by applying the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.

**Grade Level Expectation: 3.** Evaluate the impact of the political institutions that link the people to the government. GLE Code: SS.HS.4.3

**Evidence Outcomes Students Can:**

- a. Assess how members of a civil society can impact public policy on local, state, tribal, national, or international issues. For example: voting, participation in primaries and general elections, and contact with elected officials.
- b. Examine and evaluate the effectiveness of political parties, interest groups, suffrage, and social movements as a way for people to participate and influence government.
- d. Analyze how court decisions, legislative debates, and various groups have helped to preserve, develop, interpret, and limit the individual rights and ideals of the American system of government.

## Task #1 Political Background and Influences Poll

Directions: Have students complete the Political Background and Influences Poll below:

Poll Questions: (The reasoning for asking each question is explained in red below each question)

1. Has anyone in your family ever invited you to talk about their ballot or allowed you to watch them vote? (Could include going to a voting booth or mailing/dropping off a ballot.)
  - a. Yes, we do this in most elections.
  - b. Yes, in Presidential elections.
  - c. No, never.
  - d. I can't remember.

*Family is the first and largest influence on political viewpoints. When parents take their children to the polls when they vote, their children learn political efficacy and the importance of voting.*

2. Does your family regularly discuss current events/politics?
  - a. Yes, a lot.
  - b. Every once in a while.
  - c. Never.

*Family is the first and largest influence on political viewpoints. Over time, based on their own experiences and other influences, students may choose to explore their own take on issues.*

3. Did you grow up in an environment that was heavily leaning one way on the political scale?
  - a. Yes, more conservative.
  - b. Yes, more liberal.
  - c. Yes, but I don't know enough to say if it is liberal or conservative or it was neither liberal nor conservative.
  - d. No.
  - e. I don't know.



*Family is the first and largest influence on political viewpoints. Over time, based on their own experiences and other influences, students may choose to explore their own take on issues.*

**4. Do you have family members who have served in the military?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

*Family is the first and largest influence on political viewpoints. Over time, based on their own experiences and other influences, students may choose to explore their own take on issues.*

**5. Are any of your political opinions affected by what you learn in school?**

- a. Yes, the classes I take challenge my thinking and opinions.
- b. No, I just show up. It doesn't affect my opinions at all.

*Almost all American students take at least one year of American history, and many states require courses in civics. These courses may provide information that impact a student's political views.*

**6. Have you always been expected by your family to get a post-secondary education (that is, college) before going into the workforce?**

- a. Yes, I am expected to attend a 4-year university.
- b. Yes, I am expected to attend a community college.
- c. Yes, I am expected to attend a trade school.
- d. No.

*Education has the largest influence on a person's degree of political participation.*

**7. Do you make a point to seek out a diversity of ideas and opinions on social media?**

- a. Yes, I intentionally seek out social media that shows me different perspectives and ideas.
- b. No.

*Young brains can be influenced by what they see on social media. People tend to choose media that supports the ideas they already support.*

8. Would you say your religion has impacted your political viewpoints?

- a. Yes, very much. My political viewpoints are heavily influenced by my religion.
- b. Yes, somewhat. I identify as a certain religion but many of my thoughts and opinions are different than that of others who share my religion.
- c. I don't identify with any religions, or do identify with a religion but do not believe it influences my political viewpoints

*After family, the next major influence on political ideology is social groups, which includes religious groups and organizations.*

9. Do you live in a diverse environment (race, ethnicity, language, gender)?

- a. Yes, I live in an area that is extremely diverse in all areas.
- b. Yes, I live in an area with many different races and ethnicities.
- c. Yes, I live in an area with many different languages.
- d. Yes, I live in an area with many different religions.
- e. No.

*After family, the next major influence on political ideology is social groups, which includes religious groups and organizations.*

10. Would you say your friends influence your political viewpoints and opinions?

- a. Yes, I hang out with people who have similar ideas and we agree a lot.
- b. Yes, I hang out with people who have lots of different ideas, so we agree some and disagree some.
- c. No, we don't talk about any of that.
- d. Sometimes, it depends on what we talk about.

*There are many types of discussions with intimate friends. The political attitude of friends can influence and change a person's outlook.*

11. Where do you get most of your information on politics and current events?

- a. Social Media
- b. Online News Publications
- c. Podcasts
- d. Blogs
- e. TV
- f. Other people
- g. Somewhere else

*In an often biased and misleading news landscape, sources of information can greatly influence political viewpoint. Consider reviewing Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart to introduce the idea of seeking outside perspectives on news sources. The chart is available here: <https://adfontesmedia.com/>.*

12. After answering these questions, what conclusions can you draw about what affects your thoughts and opinions about our society and your political views? Be reflective and thoughtful. Answer in 2-3 sentences.

## Task #2 Overview of Political Background and Influences

Directions: Help students understand what influences political viewpoints.

Ask students how they would describe the topic of the poll they took. Accept all answers and then suggest that the poll was about the influences on political viewpoint. Ask: How would you describe p the core influences on political beliefs? Explain that students will watch a video to learn the answer to that question. Show the Kahn Academy video on what is often termed: [Political Socialization](#).

Check student understanding using the following questions (answers in red):

- Which of the following are ideas that influence people's political viewpoint:
  - The different roles that citizens play, how power is divided in government, the functions of government, or all of these? *All of these.*
- How can a parent's opinions on the importance of voting impact their child's political views? *When parents take their children to the polls when they vote, their children learn that voting is an important thing to do. This creates a sense of political efficacy.*
- True or false: The experiences that occur during childhood form a foundation of beliefs that often last into the future. *True*
- Name three of the key influencers on a person's political viewpoints.  
*Influencers: Family, peers, education, organizations (clubs, workplace, religious institution), special interest groups, media, social class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and location.*
- What role do media outlets have on your political viewpoints?  
*Our sources of information shapes our perception of reality. Understanding the biases and credibility of a source is critical to evaluating information we consume.*
- True or false: Our political viewpoints will be influenced throughout our lives.  
*True*

Then prompt student thinking about the topic by asking:

- How do you think a person's political background and influences impacts a person's view of the government?
- How do you think political background and influences impacts a person's participation in government?
- What role, if any, does the government play shaping people's political viewpoints?
- What role do you feel the government should, or should not, play in shaping people's political viewpoints?
- In what way does the large variety of factors influencing political viewpoints enhance the concept and implementation of democracy?

### **Task #3: Create a Political Background and Influence Tree**

Directions: Ask students to complete and compare political background and influence trees.

Show the students an example Political Background and Influence Tree. (Examples of trees can be found in Lesson Plan 3 in this series). Point out that the tree is a visual representation of all the factors that have contributed to your personal political background and influences.

Project or distribute the version of the Political Background and Influence Tree that includes questions to guide student thinking as they complete their own trees. Clarify how students can use this tool to complete their own trees.

Distribute the blank versions of the trees (found below) and allow time for students to create visual representations of their personal political background and influences.

Structure an opportunity for students to compare trees. You can do this by pairing students and having them share and compare their trees. As an alternative, you could collect the trees, remove students' names, and create a slideshow to present to students.

Debrief the comparison with such questions as:

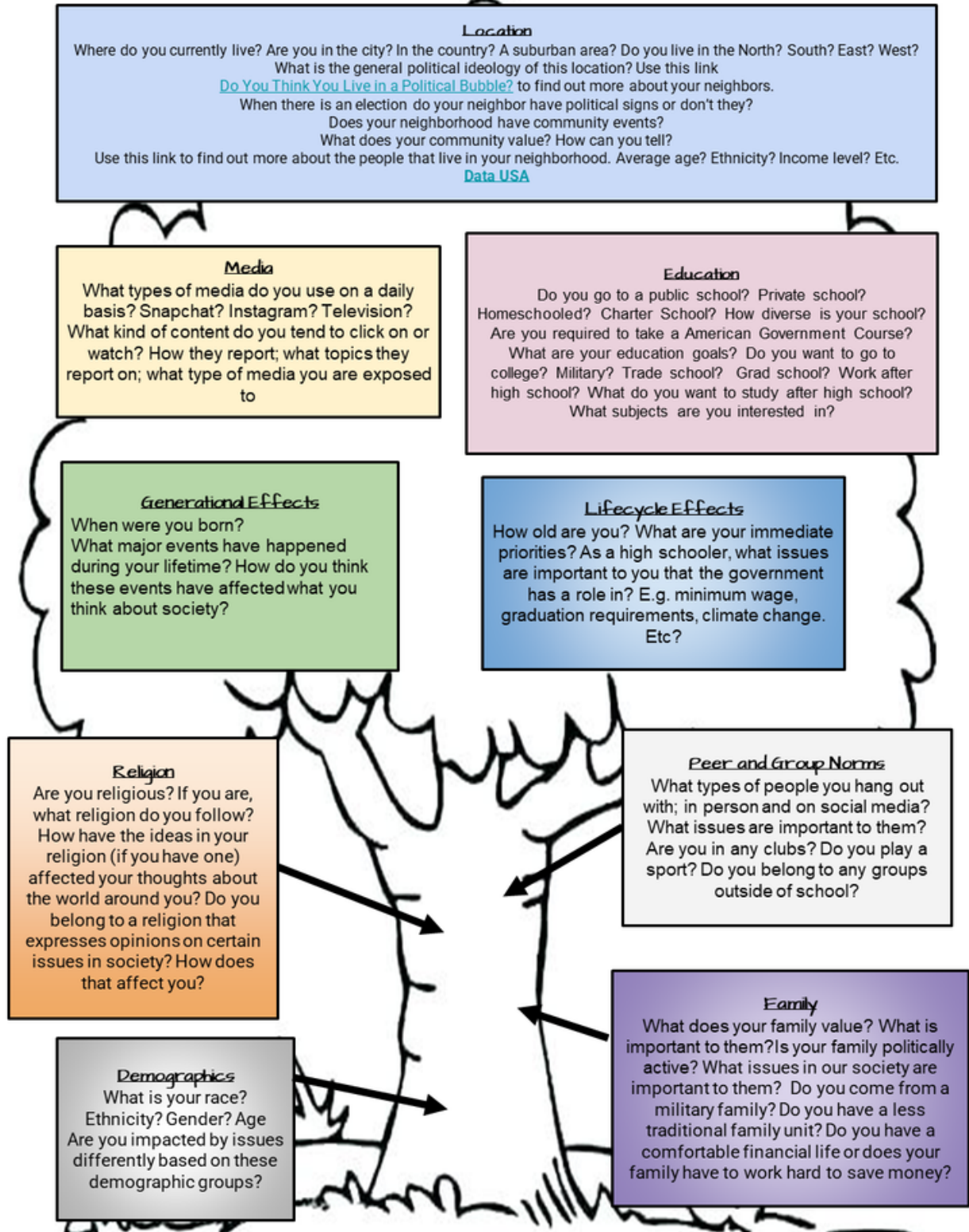
- Name as many similarities as you see in the trees.
- What differences do you see?
- Why is it important to understand someone's political socialization when discussing politics with them?
- How did creating your own tree help you better understand your own views on important issues?

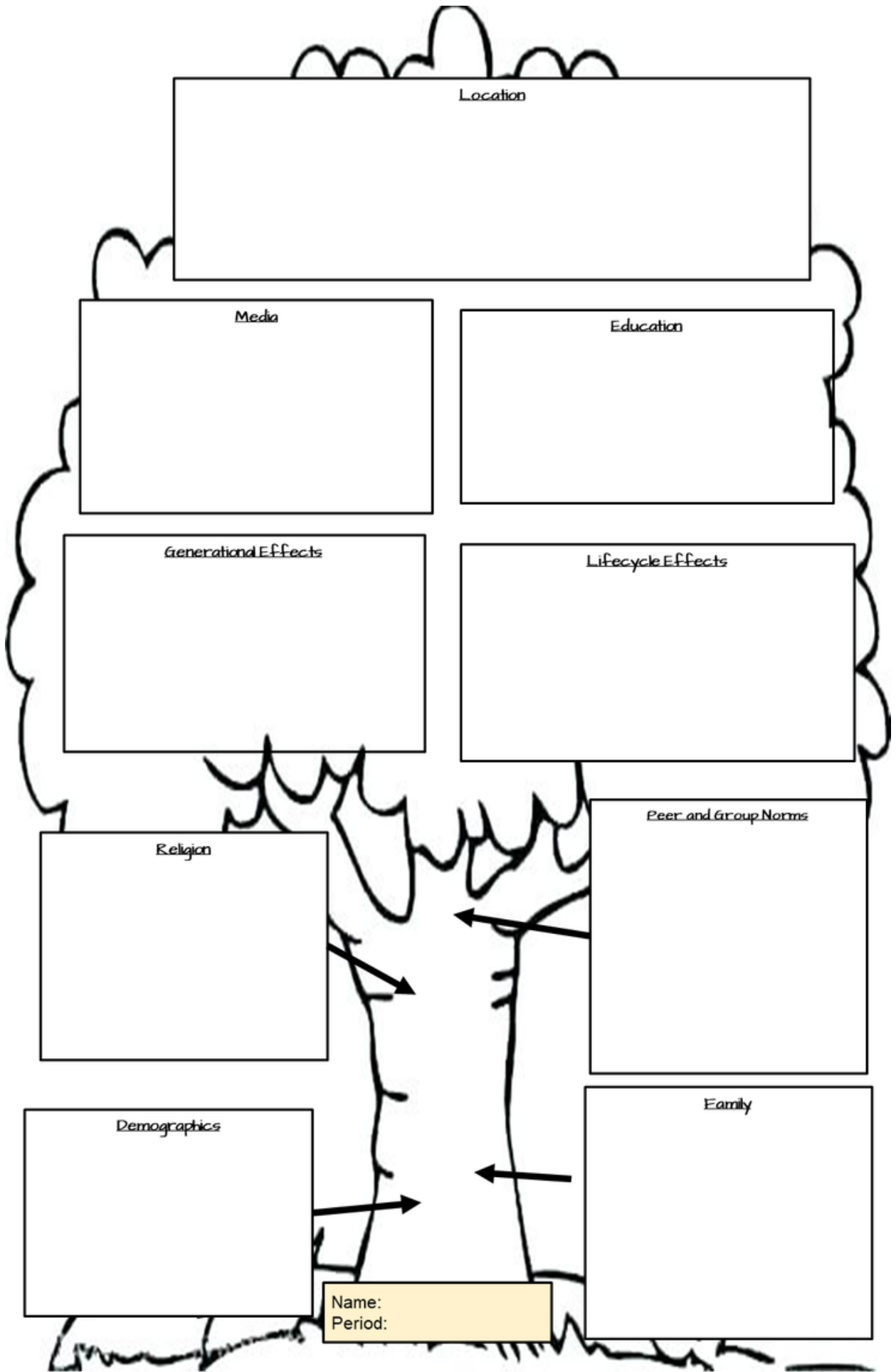
Below you can find a blank template for a potential visual for a Political Background and Influences Tree as well as a tree with questions to help students fill out their own trees.

## Political Background and Influence Tree

**Directions:** Complete the tree to create a visual representation of all the factors that have contributed to your personal political socialization. Please make your tree COLORFUL!

**WATCH ME!!!**









# Lesson Plan 2

## Documentary Viewing Guide

### Background:

The Colorado Attorney General's Office created a documentary about the Unify Challenge for Colorado highlighting a diverse set of actual participants. The documentary can be found [here](#). The documentary is freely available to teachers.

For this lesson, teachers will give a brief introduction to the Colorado Unify Challenge and the purpose of the documentary. Then students will use the provided demographic information about the participants in the documentary to make predictions about their political views. Students will then watch the documentary, using a viewing guide to record responses and observations. Finally, they will take part in a discussion of the documentary, focusing on what they have learned about talking with people with whom they disagree.

### Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Compare their predictions of political views with the views stated in the video.
- Draw conclusions about factors that improve the quality of discussions among those who disagree.
- Explain why being able to discuss issues with those who disagree with them is an important democratic skill.

**High School, Standard 4. Civics: Prepared Graduates: Prepared Graduates: 7.**

Express an understanding of how civic participation affects policy by applying the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.

**Grade Level Expectation: 3.** Evaluate the impact of the political institutions that link the people to the government. GLE Code: SS.HS.4.3

**Evidence Outcomes Students Can:**

- a. Assess how members of a civil society can impact public policy on local, state, tribal, national, or international issues. For example: voting, participation in primaries and general elections, and contact with elected officials.
- b. Examine and evaluate the effectiveness of political parties, interest groups, suffrage, and social movements as a way for people to participate and influence government.
- d. Analyze how court decisions, legislative debates, and various groups have helped to preserve, develop, interpret, and limit the individual rights and ideals of the American system of government.
- e. Examine how people in other systems of government can participate to influence policy.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1**

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3**

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

**Key Vocabulary Terms**

Common Ground: Agreement, especially among people who disagree about other things,

## **Task #1 Introduction to the Unify Challenge Documentary**

Directions: Introduce students to the Unify Challenge and the documentary they will be viewing.

Tell students they are going to watch a short documentary about the Colorado Unify Challenge. Ask: Do you have any guesses about what the Colorado Unify Challenge might be? Accept all student hypotheses and then share that the Unify Challenge as a concept was developed by a group called Unify America, which wants people in the United States to recognize that they have more in common than they think they do. Their goal is to reduce polarization, deep division along ideological/partisan lines, with people moving to extreme positions rather than positions in the center; the results of polarization may include a government that is paralyzed and antipathy among people who disagree. The Colorado Unify Challenge sought to bring these values to Coloradans directly.

Explain that the idea behind the Unify Challenge is simple: people are paired with someone who has views different from their own (someone outside their “bubble”) and have an online conversation about their views on different goals for their state or nation, looking for common ground. The documentary shows clips from two pairs of Coloradans who participated in the Colorado Unify Challenge. The Challenge focused on issues that impact Colorado directly. Ask: Why is it important to get outside our bubbles, to talk to people who are different from us and have different views? How often do you have a good conversation about serious topics with someone who disagrees with you? Accept all student answers, but be sure someone mentions that, in a democracy, we need to be able to reach agreement on policies that work for the entire United States.

## **Task #2 Previewing Activity: Analyzing Unify Participants' Backgrounds**

Directions: Prepare students to watch the video by analyzing information about the four participants.

Remind students that there are often links between demographic characteristics, personal experiences, and political views. They are going to learn about the demographic characteristics of the four people featured in the documentary and predict where each one might fall on the spectrum of political views—liberal to conservative. Organize students into groups of three and distribute the Meet the Unify Challenge Participants handout (below) and go over the directions with students. Give groups about 5 minutes to complete their work.

Share with students that Ryan and Marcus will be having a conversation, as will Wendy and Suzanne. Ask: How much common ground do you think these two pairs will find?

## **Task #3 Viewing the Unify Challenge Documentary**

Directions: Provide students with a note-taking handout and show the documentary, stopping once in the middle for a brief discussion.

Distribute the Unify Challenge Documentary Viewing Guide and go over the directions with students. Tell them you will be stopping at least once during the documentary for a brief discussion, so students should take notes as they go along. Students should remain in their groups of three while viewing the video.

Start showing the documentary. Stop when all four Coloradans have been introduced (at 5:50) and ask students how accurate their predictions were. What accounts for their accuracy or inaccuracy? Does what they have seen so far deepen or challenge their understanding of political backgrounds and influences?

Show the rest of the documentary.

## **Task #4 Debriefing the Viewing Experience**

Directions: Ask students to have a brief discussion in their groups of three and then conduct a whole-class debrief.

When the video is done, ask students to have a brief discussion in their groups of three. Each student should pick one of the quotes they wrote, explain why it was meaningful to them, and ask their group members what it means to them.

Bring the class back together, and debrief, focusing on such questions as:

- Were you surprised at how much common ground the pairs found? Why or why not?
- What do you think allowed them to find common ground? Think about how the questions were asked, the rules the discussants followed, the ways in which the discussants interacted.
- What did the discussants do well? What do you think they could do better?
- The discussion focused on goals. How might the discussion change if it turned to policies—how the goals would be achieved? What advice would you give the discussants if they decided to talk about policies?
- Do you think it would be easier or harder to have this kind of discussion with someone you don't know compared to someone you do know? Would you need different rules for a conversation with someone who matters to you on a personal level?

Two Handouts Follow:

[Meet the Unify Challenge Participants](#)

[Unify Challenge Documentary Viewing Guide](#)

## HANDOUT: Meet the Unify Challenge Participants

Directions: Read the information about the four participants you will see in the documentary. Based on their characteristics and experiences, predict where each person falls on the liberal- conservative continuum.

<p>Ryan Saunders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ryan is 31 years old.</li> <li>• Ryan is white.</li> <li>• He lives in Denver, where he grew up. His great-great-grandparents immigrated to Denver from Ireland.</li> <li>• Ryan works in private equity (a special form of investing).</li> <li>• Music is important to Ryan—he likes every kind of music except country.</li> <li>• He was bullied in high school for having views different from most students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>
<p>Marcus Weaver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marcus is 52years old.</li> <li>• Marcus is Black.</li> <li>• He lives in Denver.</li> <li>• He works as the Deputy Director of the Community Outreach Center.</li> <li>• He was shot in the Aurora theater shooting.</li> <li>• He sees the state of democracy like a wave, sometimes good, sometimes bad.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>
<p>Suzanne Spiegel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suzanne is 36 years old.</li> <li>• She is white.</li> <li>• She moved to Boulder in 2004 to attend college.</li> <li>• She now lives in Lafayette.</li> <li>• She has two dogs.</li> <li>• She works as an acupuncturist and is involved with environmental issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>
<p>Wendy Buxton-Andrade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wendy is 53 years old</li> <li>• She is white.</li> <li>• She lives in Lamar in southeastern Colorado. She was born and raised there.</li> <li>• She is currently serving her third term as a Prowers County Commissioner. She was the first woman elected to this office in her county.</li> <li>• As a hobby, she learned AcuDetox, using acupuncture to help people with addiction or mental health issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>

## HANDOUT: Unify Challenge Documentary Viewing Guide

Use this form to take notes as you watch the documentary.

1. Were your predictions about the positions of the four people in the video accurate?

Ryan	Accurate	Not accurate
Marcus	Accurate	Not accurate
Suzanne	Accurate	Not Accurate
Wendy	Accurate	Not Accurate

2. In the table below, make notes about differences of opinion and common ground you observed. (Some cells of the table will be empty if a pair isn't shown discussing a topic.)

	Ryan and Marcus	Suzanne and Wendy
Affordable housing	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Conserving public land	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Climate change	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Mental health	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:

	Ryan and Marcus	Suzanne and Wendy
Parental control of education	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Gun control	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Police officer training	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:
Support for prisoners	Disagreements:  Common Ground:	Disagreements:  Common Ground:

3. Find at least three quotes from the documentary that are meaningful to you.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Quote 3





# Lesson Plan 3

## Small Group Structured Discussions

### Background:

Students read about one of three issues covered in the documentary – 1) affordable housing, 2) parental control over what their children learn in school, or 3) red flag gun laws – and identify arguments on both sides of the issue. They are then assigned one of four identities, each with their own political background and influences tree. These four Coloradans are Brenda, Terrance, Sarah, and Daniel. You can find their Political Background Trees at the end of this lesson plan. Students take part in a small-group structured discussion, arguing from the perspective of their assigned identity. They then transition to discussing the issue from their own point of view.

### Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Identify arguments representing various perspectives on a controversial issue.
- Represent an assigned perspective and their own point of view in discussing a controversial issue.
- Recognize the complexity of political viewpoints and respect views different from their own.
- Find common ground with people holding different views.

**High School, Standard 4. Civics: Prepared Graduates: Prepared Graduates: 7.**

Express an understanding of how civic participation affects policy by applying the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.

**Grade Level Expectation: 3.** Evaluate the impact of the political institutions that link the people to the government. GLE Code: SS.HS.4.3

**Evidence Outcomes Students Can:**

- a. Assess how members of a civil society can impact public policy on local, state, tribal, national, or international issues. For example: voting, participation in primaries and general elections, and contact with elected officials.
- b. Examine and evaluate the effectiveness of political parties, interest groups, suffrage, and social movements as a way for people to participate and influence government.
- d. Analyze how court decisions, legislative debates, and various groups have helped to preserve, develop, interpret, and limit the individual rights and ideals of the American system of government.
- e. Examine how people in other systems of government can participate to influence policy.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1**

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3**

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

**Key Vocabulary Terms**

**Affordable housing:** Housing for which the monthly cost of the rent or mortgage is no more than one-third of what a household earns.

**Curriculum:** The term often refers specifically to a planned sequence of instruction for a course or subject at a particular grade level. It often includes instructional goals and documents what state standards will be addressed and assessed. Curriculums can be very detailed or general. A curriculum often cites the resources to be used by teachers and students. It is usually much more than a textbook or sequence of learning activities presented by a publisher.

**Red flag law:** Law that allows law enforcement, family, and/or friends to ask a judge to take away someone's weapons because that person is a threat to.

## **Task #1: Learning about the Issue**

Directions: Select the issue to be discussed and have students learn about the issue

You may select the issue to be discussed (affordable housing, parental control over what their children learn in school, or red flag gun laws) based on curricular fit or your assessment of student interest. Alternatively, you might let students choose a topic. If you opt to have students choose, start by reading the three structured discussion questions aloud, reminding them that these are three questions they heard on the video:

- Do you agree that for Coloradans who live and work in our communities, housing should be available and affordable?
- Do you agree that parents should have more control over what their children learn and do not learn in school?
- Do you agree that when there is evidence that a person could harm themselves or others, they should not have access to firearms, including their own?

Designate a different area of the classroom for each option and ask students to go to the area for the question they would most like to discuss. Give students a few minutes to talk with classmates who favor the same question about why they think talking about that question would be interesting and productive. Then ask each group to present their most compelling reason for favoring that question to the class. When all groups have presented, have students return to their seats. Then take a class vote to select an issue.

Organize students into groups of four and explain that they will be conducting a discussion in these groups. Within each group, designate two students as Team A and two as Team B. Give each pair of students a Political Background and Influences tree (the pairs in each group should have different people) and explain that they are to represent the person they have been given in the first part of the discussion. Allow time for pairs to become familiar with their assigned person and make some hypotheses about how this person would feel about the issue.

Return to the idea of discussion, defining it with students (an informed and thoughtful discussion of an issue with the aim of making a decision). Point out that since a discussion should be informed, students will spend some time learning more about the chosen issue. Articles and videos have been identified to help with this task. Feel free to delete or add items based on student needs and time. Distribute the appropriate Background handout and the Discussion Graphic Organizer to students. Allow time for students to explore the topic and complete Question 1 on the Graphic Organizer.

## **Task #2: Small Group Structured Discussion**

Directions: Have students present their assigned identities' positions on the issue and look for common ground.

Tell students it's time for them to share their assigned person's position on the topic with the other pair in their group and to learn about that pair's person. Once they understand the positions of the assigned people, they should look for common ground. Answer any questions students have and review the discussion norms from the video, as well as established discussion norms in your classroom, asking for students' commitment to follow these norms:

- Expect to disagree. That's a good thing. Do it respectfully.
- Stay curious. Listen to listen instead of listening to respond – momentarily putting aside what you will say next.
- Be mindful of your own behavior. Notice how you internally are reacting/responding when others speak.
- Discuss the positions of your assigned person, but do not attempt to imitate how you think they might speak, act, or look.
- Ask clarifying questions. Don't assume that you know what someone else means. Ask the speaker to help you understand perspectives different from your own.
- Avoid taking over the conversation and talking over someone else who is speaking, even when you are excited.
- No side conversations. They are disrespectful to the speaker and distract listeners from the person who has the floor.
- If someone says something that hurts or offends you, do not attack the person. Acknowledge that the comment—not the person—hurt your feelings and explain why.

- Find common ground. Identify and call attention to areas of agreement.
- Make comments using “I” statements. (“I disagree with what you said. Here’s what I think.”)
- [Establish ground rules](#) - practice these in a fun way first. From The Federal Courts, they also provide [Example of Student-Developed Civility Rules](#). Also see [FOSTERING CIVIL DISCOURSE](#).

Allow time for students to discuss, representing their assigned perspectives.

Next, move to questions 3 and 4 on the Graphic Organizer—preparing to and discussing the issue from their own perspectives, again looking for common ground.

### **Task #3: Debrief**

Directions: Bring the group back together for a final debrief.

Use questions such as the following to generate reflection and discussion:

- Did your group find any common ground? If so, what made it possible? If not, what prevented your doing so?
- What did your group do well in the discussion? Where could you improve?
- What were some emotions that you felt as you engaged in today’s discussion? How do you think those emotions impacted the discussion?
- Raise your hand if you:
  - changed your mind?
  - considered a different point of view than you had originally?
  - felt listened to.
- Why is it important for people in a democracy to discuss issues on which they disagree? How might you encourage others to take part in such conversations?

Background information about the three issues and the Discussion Graphic Organizer follow.

## HANDOUT: Discussion Graphic Organizer

Name:	Partner:
Issue being discussed:	Assigned Perspective:

1. While going through the materials for this topic with your partner, write down 3-4 points that you think would be important to your assigned person. Make sure to explain using evidence from the materials and the Political Background and Influences tree.
2. Share the notes you wrote with the other partner group at your table. Make sure that each set of partners gets to explain their assigned perspective's side thoroughly. Then, find something about the topic that both sides can agree on. Where can these two perspectives find common ground? Explain in the space below.
3. Now that you've discussed the issue from the perspective of someone else, it's time to discuss your own perspective. What are your thoughts on this topic? Write down your thoughts below and be prepared to share them with your group.
4. Have an open discussion with your group. Make sure that each person in the group gets a chance to share their thoughts. Use the sentence starters below to help you as you have your discussion.
  - I still have a question about...
  - I disagree with... because...
  - I'm wondering...
  - In my experience...
  - I think that...
  - I don't understand what you just said.
  - I agree with... because... Can you explain?

## **HANDOUT: Background on Affordable Housing**

The question for this topic in the documentary was: For Coloradans who live and work in our communities, housing should be available and affordable. Marcus and Ryan were both passionate about this topic. Ryan supports affordable housing as long as people are working for it in some way. Marcus works with people in subsidized housing so he has a more personal viewpoint on the matter. He thinks that people will want to succeed when they're given the tools to do so.

Here is a video that further discusses the issue of affordable housing in Colorado:

<https://vimeo.com/701760807>

To put this into context, the minimum wage in Colorado is \$13.65 per hour in 2023. This comes out to a little more than \$2000 per month. The general recommendation is that you don't spend more than a third of your income on housing. That means that someone earning minimum wage in Colorado would need to pay no more than \$670 on rent but the average rent in Colorado is over \$1,000 in most cities.

There are a number of ways that lawmakers have tried to solve the housing crisis. One way is to designate federal and state funds for creating and maintaining affordable housing for people and families who earn less money. Another way is to encourage people to save so that they can buy a house and no longer have to rent.

Podcast: [Colorado's affordable housing crisis explained. CPR News is exploring the issue through real stories](#)

Articles:

[The seductive con of 'affordable housing' – Complete Colorado](#)

[Colorado voters approve Proposition 123, dedicating \\$300 million annually to affordable housing](#)

## **HANDOUT: Background on Parents' Say about What Is Taught in Public School**

In the video Suzanne and Wendy seem to disagree concerning this prompt: Parents should have more control over what their children learn and do not learn in School. Here is a part of their conversation:

Wendy (W)- I strongly agree parents should be able to decide what kids learn.

Suzanne (S)- What if parents don't believe the Holocaust happened? Then they don't want their kids to know that happened, that's tricky?

W - Honestly, I was going through school and we have Camp Amache, and it was never taught. How sad. It's now a National Park in my county, we didn't even know it was here. (Documentary introduces Camp Amache, its role in World War II and the internment of Japanese Americans.) History should be taught. Some of it is bad, some if it is good, but we learn from history and we don't want it to repeat itself. So, it needs to be taught and it needs to be taught factually.

S - I agree.

The creators of the challenge also provided these follow up questions

- Has your community struggled with what is being taught in schools?
- What would you like to see changed about your schools?
- What would you want someone outside of your community to understand about schools in your area?

**Review of public education decisions in Colorado**

Before discussing this issue, it's important to have a sense of how public education decisions are made in Colorado. It's more complicated than most people realize. Here's a quick overview of the basics.

Unlike many other states, the Colorado Constitution and our state laws give most of the authority to administer schools to local communities. Many pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade public education decisions - on issues such as curriculum, personnel, school calendars, graduation requirements, and classroom policy - are made individually by the 178 school districts and their elected local school boards.



Local school board members are elected and typically serve four-year terms. Recent changes in state law allow members to be paid, yet only a few districts have considered this option. One of the most important jobs of a school board is to employ a superintendent and to hold the superintendent responsible for managing the schools in accordance with federal law, state law, and the school board's policies. The board sets educational goals and budgets for schools, keeping in mind state laws, community values and their specific responsibilities to taxpayers, students, and the district staff.

Some facets of education are managed from the state level. The [State Board of Education](#) is made up of seven elected members, representing congressional districts and serving 6-year terms. They implement state and federal education laws, disburse state and federal funds, hold schools and districts accountable for performance, licenses educators, and provides public transparency of performance and financial data. The state board members appoint the Commissioner of Education to oversee the Colorado Department of Education and carry out this work. Laws passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor frame much of what the state board discusses, votes on, and what they instruct the Department of Education to act upon.

To sum up, the state provides guidelines and a large share of the funding for education. How it gets done is decided at the local school district level. Both levels involve the interaction of elected and appointed public officials.

Level	Elected	Appointed	Funding
Local School District	School Board Members	Superintendent of Schools  Principals	39% mostly from local property taxes
State Government	State School Board Members State Legislatures (House and Senate) Governor	Commissioner of Education Department of Education Staff	61% mostly from state income taxes

Parents have many ways to influence what happens in public schools and influence what their children learn. These include:

- Voting in school board elections.
- Taking part in campaigns for school board members they support.
- Attending school board meetings, communicating with school board.
- Communicating with school administrators and teachers.
- Serving and/or attending [School and District Accountability Committees \(SACs and DACs\)](#) | [CDE](#).
- Serving and/or attending [Parent Councils and Advisory Boards](#).
- Most districts provide a process for community members to weigh in on major resource and curriculum program purchases.
- Most districts and schools provide overviews of learning goals and approaches by grade and course.
- Request that students opt out of certain kinds of learning. Most schools and districts have a process in place.
- Colorado provides [open enrollment options](#). Students can attend almost any public school in Colorado if space exists. Includes publicly funded [charter](#) and magnet schools.
- Parents can [home school](#) or enroll students in private schools. In most cases private schools would require tuition to be paid by the parents.

## Readings

[Parents' Rights: CQR](#) Should parents have full control over the education of their children? Provides an overview of the issue across the country and Pro/Con commentary. There's a lot here so teachers may want to advise students to focus on particular sections. Congressional Quarterly Review, August 2022

[School Choice: Protecting Parental Rights, Resolving Curriculum Wars, And Reducing Inequality | The Heritage Foundation](#) The solution is school choice and vouchers. Heritage Foundation, March 25, 2022

[Colorado committee rejects curriculum transparency bill](#)  
From Chalkbeat Colorado, March 4, 2022

[When it comes to schools, do parents need a bill of rights? | Vince Bzdek | Election Coverage | gazette.com](#) The Gazette, Nov 6, 2021

## More Background About How Education Policy Works In CO

[Built to Serve\\_ Being a school board member](#) Guide to being a school board member in CO

Role of [State Board](#), Legislature, Governor, and [CDE CDE's Tasks](#)  
[Role of School Board Education | Gov. Office - Operations](#)

## **HANDOUT: Background on Red Flag Laws**

Red flag laws allow law enforcement, family members, and/or friends to ask a court to temporarily remove guns from a person and prevent them from purchasing guns because that person poses a threat to themselves or others. The laws require that the person that is believed to be a threat be provided a lawyer for free and a chance to have a hearing in front of a judge. The judge makes the decision on whether there is enough evidence to demonstrate that person is actually a threat to themselves or others.

In the video, the discussants seemed to agree that these laws were a good idea. But not everyone agrees. In fact, the laws are controversial. Some people think such laws are a good idea because they could save lives. Others think the laws are a bad idea because they impermissibly infringe on the Second Amendment, which protects the right to bear arms.

Learn more about the arguments on both sides of the question by exploring some of the sources below. You may want to divide up the sources among your group members so the group has as much information as possible.

Videos:

What Are Red Flag Laws? CBS News, July 5, 2022, [What are "red flag" laws?](#)  
Approx. 2 minutes

Red Flag Laws: How They Work and Which States Enforce them, CBS News, July 7, 2022, [Red flag laws: How they work and which states enforce them](#) Approx. 2 minutes

Day After Colorado Mass Shooting, Gun Law Experts Debate Red Flag Laws, NBC, March 23, 2021, [Day After Colorado Mass Shooting, Gun Law Experts Debate Red Flag Laws - NBC Connecticut](#) 2 minutes, 40 seconds

Readings:

Red Flag Gun Laws, Close Up Foundation, 2019,. [RED FLAG GUN LAWS](#) Pages 2-5 are especially helpful.

Keeping Guns Away from Potentially Dangerous People, American Psychological Association, September 2018, [Keeping guns away from potentially dangerous people](#).

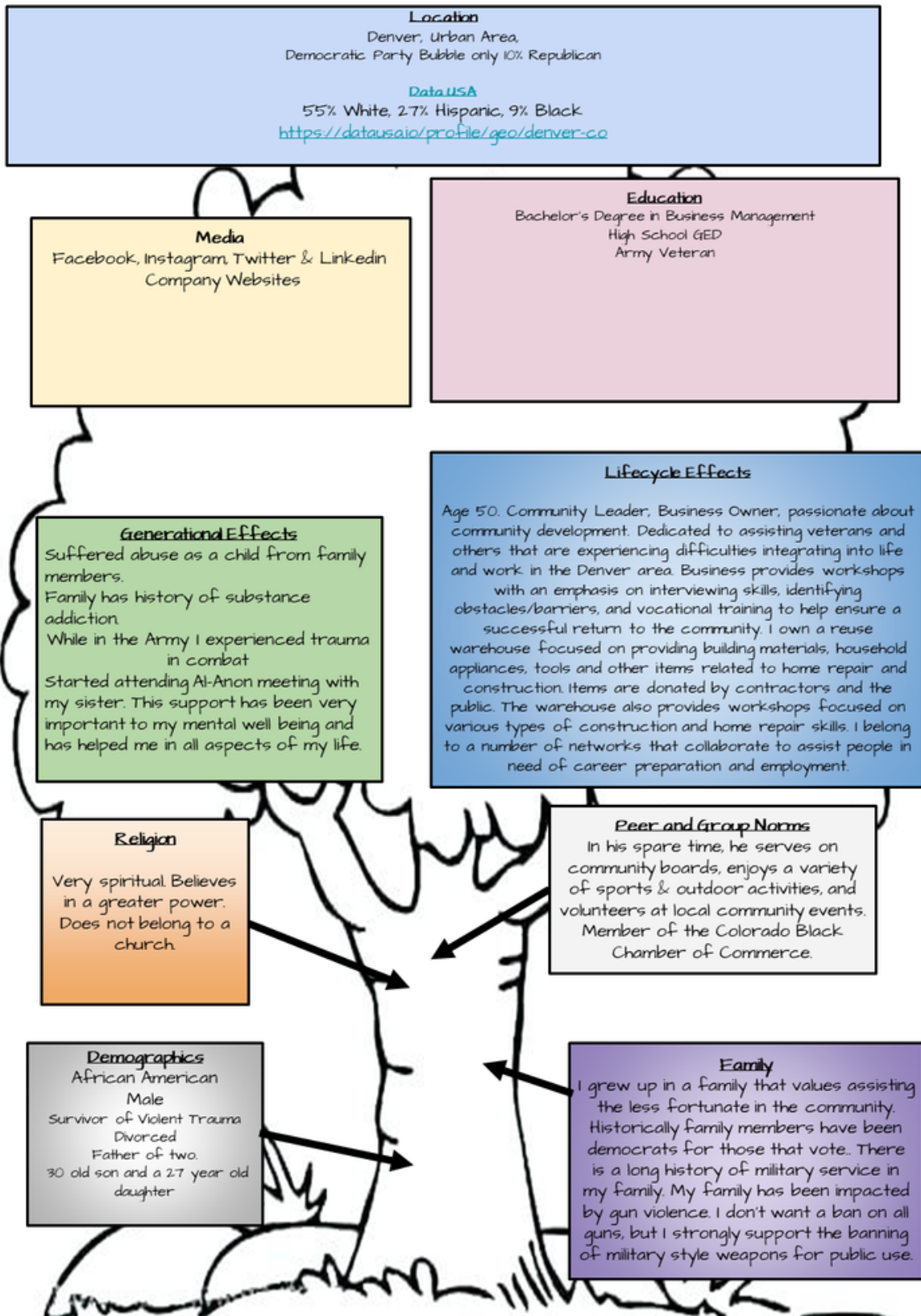
Gun Seizures More Likely Under Colorado's Red Flag If Law Enforcement Is Involved, 9 News, May 25, 2022. [Gun seizures more likely under Colorado's Red Flag if law enforcement is involved](#).

Red Flag Laws Spur Debate Over Due Process, Pew, September 4, 2019, [Red Flag Laws Spur Debate Over Due Process | The Pew Charitable Trusts](#).

POLITICAL BACKGROUND TREES

**HANDOUT:**

**Terrance's Political Background and Influence Tree**



# HANDOUT:

## Daniel's Political Background and Influence Tree

Location  
Denver, Lower Downtown Area  
Democratic Bubble-only 2% of people in the neighborhood are Republican  
Most of the people live in high rises, so there aren't a lot of political signs. There's a lot happening in the neighborhood-an active nightlife scene-but there's not a strong community like there is in other places in Denver. Average age is 34, with many well-educated single people earning good incomes.

Media  
Music is very important to me. I love almost all types of music though I'm not crazy about EDM. I'm on several social media sites, but I don't post much. I mostly browse to see what my friends are doing and to read headlines in the news.  
Because of my job, I follow financial news very closely.

Education  
Attended Denver North High School  
Was class president junior and senior years. And graduated at the top of my class.  
I had my car keyed in high school after I put a parking sticker for a McCain rally on my car!  
Graduated from University of Colorado with a degree in international business  
Studied at the London School of Economics, receiving a master's degree in finance.

Generational Effects  
Born and raised in Denver, Colorado. Father's family has lived in Colorado since before it was a state. Mother's family immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba in the 1960s. They settled in Northwest Denver in the 1980s.

Lifecycle Effects  
I'm an investment banker... Early in my career, I was an intern with a public affairs consulting firm.  
I am interested in many issues from arts and culture to economic empowerment, education, and human rights

Peer and Group Norms  
Many of my role models are successful businessmen-Mark Cuban, Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Masaru Miyasaka.  
I play in a soccer league and work out several times a week with three guys I've known since high school. I belong to a service club and sometimes go to jam sessions with a group of friends who are a lot more talented than I am.

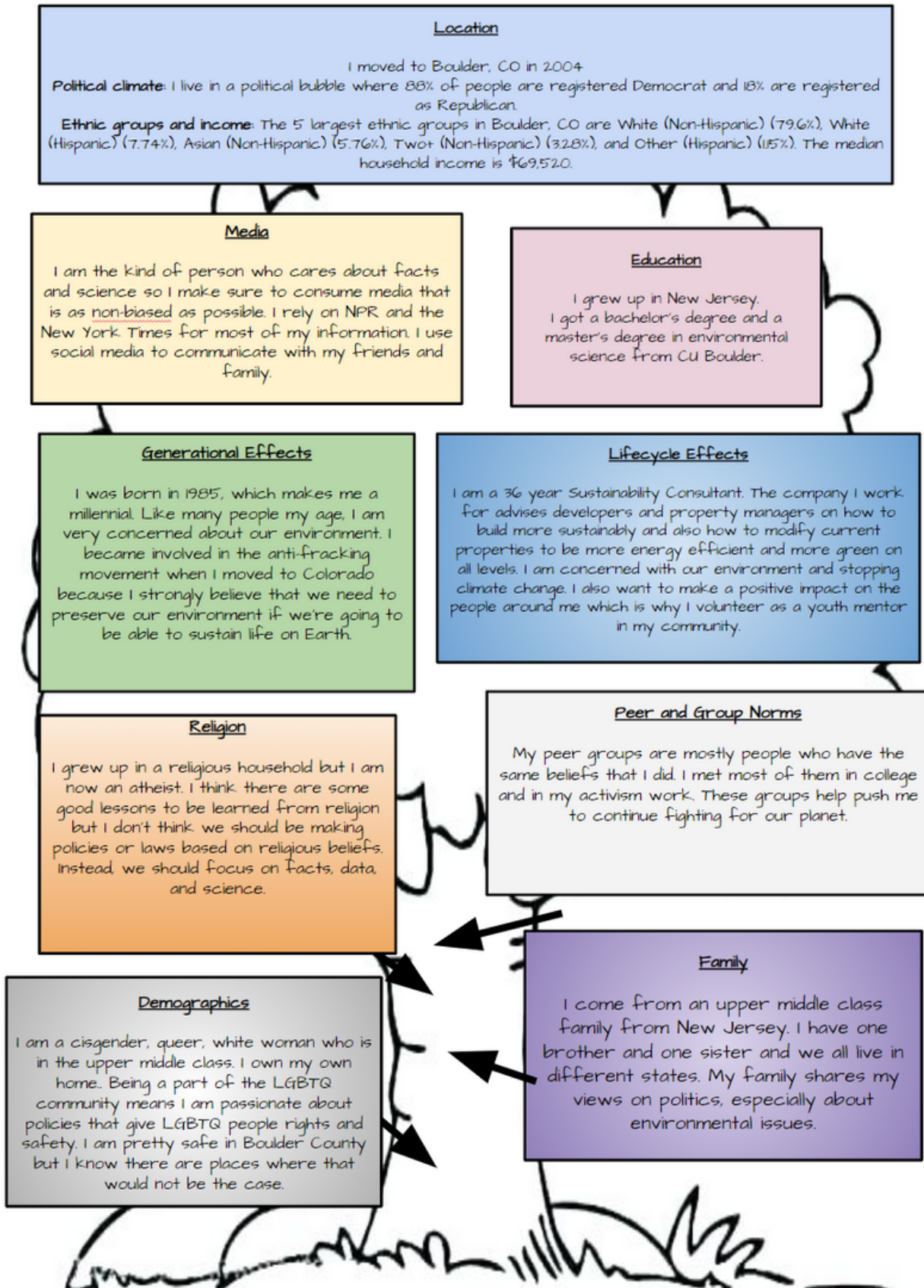
Religion  
I consider myself pretty religious, although my mom wishes I would go to mass more often. I grew up in a Catholic church that opposed abortion and capital punishment; those beliefs have shaped my views. But our church also advocated for justice for all people, which is also important to me.

Family  
Single, no children. My parents still live in NW Denver and are active in the community. They are both teachers so they care a lot about education. We weren't rich when I was going up, but we always had what we needed.  
One of my brothers lives in Broomfield with his wife and two kids. He's also a teacher. My other brother is in the U.S. Air Force. Our family has always had a mix of political views-we try to change each others' minds, but we do it without getting angry.

Demographics  
Latinx male, 31 years old  
Registered Republican

# HANDOUT:

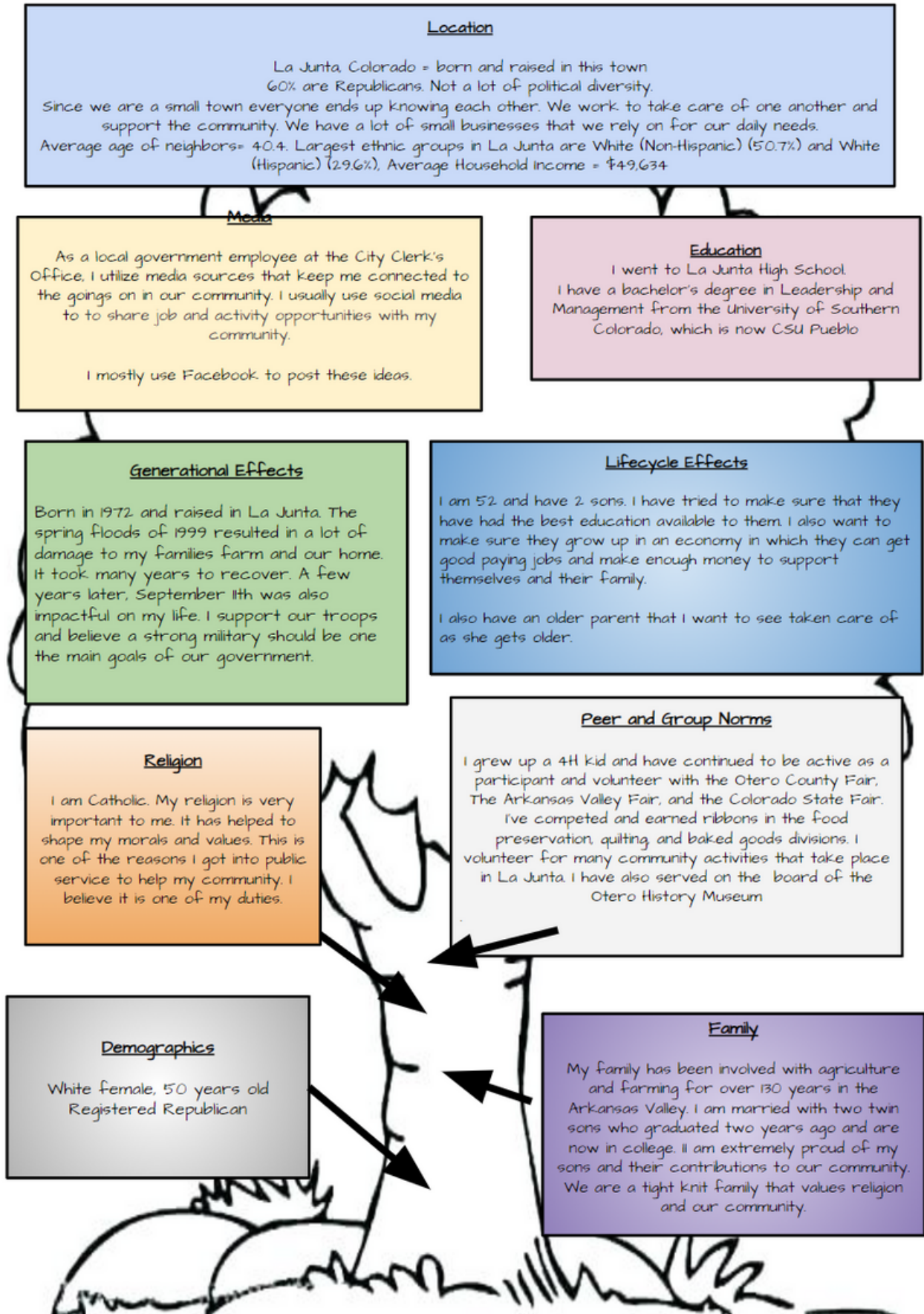
## Sarah's Political Background and Influence Tree





**HANDOUT:**

**Brenda's Political Background and Influence Tree**





# Additional Resources

## Colorado Based Resources

[Constitution Day Project](#) | [Colorado Law](#)

[The Ginsburg/Scalia Initiative - Colorado Attorney General](#)

[Lessons on Local Government](#)

[Colorado Encyclopedia](#) see [Digital Collections](#) and [Themes](#), & [CO Constitution](#)  
[GeoCivics](#)

[Colorado Center for Civic Learning and Engagement](#)

[Colorado Judicial Learning Center](#)

[Colorado Municipal League](#) see [Topics & Key Issues](#)

[Local Government Handbook \(2018\)](#) | [Colorado General Assembly](#)

[Active Local Governments by Type](#) and [CO Local Governments](#)

[Special District Association of Colorado](#)

[Chalkbeat Colorado](#)

[Colorado Newspapers](#)

[Colorado Sun](#)

[Denver Post Your Hub](#)

[Colorado State Library](#)

[Colorado Virtual Library](#)

[Colorado League of Women Voters](#)

[Our Courts Colorado](#)

[CO Social Studies Organizations](#) | [CDE](#)

## Resources for Civil Discourse and Teaching Continuous Topics

[Setting Ground Rules - Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions | United States Courts](#)

[Deliberations | Street Law, Inc.](#)

[Engaging in Civil Discourse about Contentious Topics | Maine Department of Education](#)

[The Better Arguments Project](#)

[Structured Academic Controversy \(SAC\) | Teaching Channel Teacher Moves: Bill of Rights Institute Teaching Logic and Reasoning](#)

[Bill of Rights Institute Intro to Socratic Pedagogy](#)

[Facilitate Student Reasoning and Collaboration](#)

[Student Moves: Teach the Language of Complex Thinking](#)

[Guardians of Democracy Teachers](#)

[Digital Civics Toolkit Dialogue CS | digitalcivicstoolkit](#)

[Digital Promise Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines](#)

[Talking Across Political Differences](#)

[Using Controversy as a Teaching Tool](#)

[Teaching Controversy](#)

[The Roadmap - Educating for American Democracy](#)

[The Five Design Challenges - Educating for American Democracy](#)

[Civics](#)

[Learning for Justice MS Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#)

[Fostering Civic Discourse - A Guide for Classroom Conversations Facing History](#)

[Structured Academic Controversy \(From PBS Newshour Extra\)](#)

[Guide for Setting Ground Rules](#)

[Structured Academic Controversy \(From NWABR\)](#)

[Creating a Classroom Contract \(Lesson from Facing History and Ourselves\)](#)

[The Benefits of Implementing a Structured Academic Controversy in the Classroom](#)

[Navigating Difficult Conversations: Creating an Environment for Social Issue Discussion \(Webinar/Part 1\)](#)

[Navigating Difficult Conversations: Creating an Environment for Social Issue Discussion \(Webinar/Part 2\)](#)

[Classroom Resources by Topic | The National Constitution Center](#)

## Resources for Topic Perspectives and Media Literacy Support

[Civic Online Reasoning](#)

[All Sides News](#)

[Pro/Con.org](#)

[Media Literacy Toolkit](#) (Iowa DOE)

[News Literacy Project](#)

[AllSides Media Bias Chart](#)

[Interactive Media Bias Chart Public - Ad Fontes Media](#)

[EDUCATING FOR MISUNDERSTANDING:](#)

[Middle Ground - Best Of | Jubilee - YouTube](#)

[Liberal vs Conservative: 24 Hours Side By Side](#)

[Congressional Quarterly](#)

[National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

[Constructive Dialogue Institute: Perspectives](#). To access, [click this link](#) select "High School Classroom" from the menu. From there, you'll have to enter your name and email and go through a few slides, then it will take you to a menu where you can navigate to all of the modules. These online learning modules are reflective of the research behind the Unify Challenge. The package includes:

- 8 interactive online lessons: Each 30-minute lesson includes interactive exercises, self-reflection, simulated conversations, and practical tips to help you sharpen your decision-making and hone your communication skills.
- 4 Peer-to-Peer Conversations: After every 2 lessons, you'll meet with a partner from your class for a 45-minute conversation. Together, you'll explore the themes covered in the previous lessons and put your new skills into practice.