

Lesson Plan Seven

BLACK AMERICANS IN CONGRESS SPEAK THEIR MIND



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 7 to 12



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to accompany *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007*. Students have the opportunity to analyze a series of statements made by Black Americans who served in Congress. Students are encouraged to think about the role that quotations can play in the study of history. (Citations for the quotation exercise used in this activity appear in the Historical Quotations document.)



CURRICULUM CONNECTION

- U.S. history, American government, African-American studies, social studies
- Reconstruction, World War II, civil rights movement, women’s rights



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to analyze public statements made by historic figures.
2. Students should be able to analyze the relationship between public statements and the historical record.
3. Students should be able to discern between opinion and fact.
4. Students should be able to analyze the relationship between public statements and the African Americans who have served in Congress.



LESSON PLAN

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion using the questions below:
 - b. What are a few famous statements made by historical figures that you recall? What makes these statements memorable?
 - c. What are some of the reasons why people make public statements?
 - d. What is the relationship between opinion and fact in public statements?
 - e. What purpose can quotes play in the study of history? Provide several examples.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Distribute the “Detecting History” worksheet (located on pages 3 and 4) to each group and review the directions with the class. Ask students to complete the worksheet and provide time for students to present their findings to the class.
3. Distribute the accompanying Historical Quotations document <http://baic.house.gov/education/lesson-plans/quotes.pdf> to the class. At this point, each group can compare this document with their answers on the “Detecting History” worksheet. Allow time for a brief discussion and questions.
4. Assign or have each group choose two of the quotations made by black Members. Distribute the “Quote Analysis” worksheet (located on page 5). Review the directions and ask students to complete the worksheet.

5. If time permits, have each group read the *Black Americans in Congress* profiles for the quoted Members <http://baic.house.gov/member-profiles/>. Then, ask students to draft an outline of the profile which includes: state represented; years of service; one opinion and one fact from the profile; two quotes (not including the one already analyzed); and three career highlights. As a class, display each of the outlines for the African-American Members on a bulletin board or in a central location. Lead a class discussion which encourages students to compare and contrast the quotes and the careers of the black Representatives and Senators. Also, ask students to talk about the difference between fact and opinion, and the role this plays in the analysis of quotes.
6. If time permits, conduct one of the optional extended activities.



SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Assign a series of topics (historic and current) and have students create their own quotes to express their opinions. Encourage students to research the topics so that they can make an informed and factually-based quote on the subject.
2. Write a 500-word newspaper article on your Representative or one of your Senators which includes at least three quotes by the featured politician.
3. Invite a historian to speak to the class to explain the importance and usefulness of quotes in the study of history.



ONLINE RESOURCES

Online Biographical Directory of the United States Congress

Searchable database that contains biographical information on every person who served in Congress.

<http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Office of the Clerk, Art & History

Includes information on the history and art of the U.S. House of Representatives such as weekly historical highlights, party divisions, congressional apportionment, leadership and officers, and significant events.

http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/index.html

Senate Historical Office

Includes information on the history and art of the U.S. Senate such as facts and milestones, historical statistics, featured biographies, and a photographic collection.

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm

Library of Congress/THOMAS

Searchable database of congressional legislation from 1973 to present (bill text and roll call votes are available from 1989 to present).

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

GPO Access

Includes links for searchable databases of the *Congressional Record* and *House Journal* (1994 to present) as well as information on how to find the nearest federal depository library.

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>



DETECTING HISTORY WORKSHEET

Play the role of a historian and a detective by completing the table below. Match the black Member of Congress listed at the end of this worksheet with the correct corresponding quote. For each quote, compile a short list of clues. Note that each Member should only be used once in this exercise.

Quote	Member	Clues
“We [Black Americans] are earnest in our support of the Government. We are earnest in the house of the nation’s perils and dangers; and now, in our country’s comparative peace and tranquility, we are earnest for our rights.”		
“To get up every day and put on your uniform and put on your tie and march on the floor of Congress knowing that, in your hands, in that card, in your very being, you have life and death in your hands, it is an incredible thing.”		
“My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life.”		
“I’ve always got my mouth open, sometimes my foot is in it, but it is always open. It serves a purpose; it digs at the white man’s conscience.”		
“I am not going into Congress as a Negro with a chip on my shoulder thinking I am of an inferior race and that every man’s hand is against me. I am going in as an American citizen, entitled to my rights, no more, no less, and I shall insist on them. I’m going as the representative of all the people of my district.”		
“If [an African American] is a man, he is entitled to all the rights and privileges of any other man. There can be no grades of citizenship under the American flag.”		
“I could just stand on the side and be a spectator. But politics is not a spectator sport. And in Washington, it’s a contact sport. I don’t play to tie, I try to play to win. But you can only win if you are in the game.”		
“In every regard, we were treated as second-class soldiers, if not worse, and we were angry. I felt a personal frustration and bitterness I had not known before in my life.”		
“The black man must step forward, but that doesn’t mean that black women have to step back.”		

Quote	Member	Clues
<p>“If you believe in fighting racism, you make a commitment for the rest of your life. There’s no getting off that train. You can’t say, ‘I’ve put five years in fighting racism and now I am finished.’ No, you are not finished. Our job is to fight it every day, to continue to shove it down and when it rises up to shove it down even harder.”</p>		
<p>“We have a group of new members whose strategies were shaped in the post-civil rights movement—who use leverage within the system. We see ourselves not as civil rights leaders, but as legislators.”</p>		
<p>“I regret, sir, that the dark hue of my skin may lend a color to the imputation that I am controlled by motives personal to myself in my advocacy of this great measure of national justice. The motive that impels me is restricted to no such boundary, but is as broad as your Constitution. I advocate it because it is right.”</p>		
<p>“The leadership belongs not to the loudest, not to those who beat the drums or blow the trumpets, but to those who day in and day out, in all seasons, work for the practical realization of a better world—those who have the stamina to persist and remain dedicated.”</p>		
<p>“I’m going to keep on denouncing the inequities of this system, but I’m going to work within it. To go outside the system would be to deny myself—to deny my own existence. I’ve beaten the system. I’ve proved it can be done—so have a lot of others. But the problem is that a black man has to be extra special to win in this system. Why should you have to be a super black to get someplace? That’s what’s wrong in the society. The ordinary black man doesn’t have the same chance as the ordinary white man does.”</p>		
<p>“This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes’ temporary farewell to the American Congress. But let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again.”</p>		

Black Members Of Congress

- Senator Edward Brooke III
- Representative Shirley A. Chisholm
- Representative Ronald V. Dellums
- Representative Robert Brown Elliott
- Representative William Herbert (Bill) Gray III
- Representative Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins
- Representative John Adams Hyman
- Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.
- Representative Kweisi Mfume
- Representative Arthur Wergs Mitchell
- Representative Parren James Mitchell
- Representative Joseph Hayne Rainey
- Representative Robert Smalls
- Representative Louis Stokes
- Representative George Henry White



QUOTE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Answer the questions below for both of the historical quotations spoken by black Members of Congress.

1. Who is the speaker?
2. What is the main topic of the quote?
3. What other issues are discussed?
4. List a fact contained in the quote. List an opinion contained in the quote. How can you differentiate between fact and opinion?
5. When (approximately) do you think this statement was made? Provide evidence to support your answer.
6. Why do you think the speaker made this statement? In your opinion, are there multiple interpretations for the quote? Explain.
7. What does this statement reveal about the speaker?
8. Compare and contrast the two questions.