

Does Celebrity Require Social Responsibility?



U.S. athletes Tommie Smith, center, and John Carlos raise gloved hands skyward during the playing of the Star Spangled Banner after Smith received the gold and Carlos the bronze for the 200 meter run at the Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, 1968. AP Photo

Supporting Questions

1. How do celebrities give back to society?
2. What can celebrities accomplish by taking a public stance on social issues?
3. What do celebrities risk by taking a public stance on social issues?

6th-8th Grade Celebrity Responsibility Inquiry

Does Celebrity Require Social Responsibility?

C3 Framework Indicators	D2.Civ.1.6-8. Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and the media in a variety of governmental and nongovernmental contexts. D4.1.6-8. Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.
Cognitive Skills	Argumentative Claim, Counterclaims, Selection of Evidence, Explanation of Evidence
Staging the Compelling Question	Watch a video documenting the protest of NFL player Colin Kaepernick and participate in a class discussion that assesses the extent to which Kaepernick’s actions were responsible.

Supporting Question 1

How do celebrities give back to society?

Formative Performance Task

Create a detailed list that shows the various ways celebrities give back to society.

Featured Sources

Source A: “The New Ethics of Pop: Celebrity Activism since Lady Gaga”

Source B: “5 Latino Philanthropists Using Fame for Good”

Source C: “Top 5 Black Celebrity Philanthropists of All Time!”

Supporting Question 2

What can celebrities accomplish by taking a public stance on social issues?

Formative Performance Task

Complete part of a Venn Diagram that documents the accomplishments of celebrities who take public stance.

Featured Sources

Source A: “For black celebrities like Oprah, it’s impossible to be apolitical”

Source B: “Colin Kaepernick has done more than make a statement, he has shown NFL players their power”

Source C: “Eva Longoria wants the Senate to Pass the DREAM Act”

Supporting Question 3

What do celebrities risk by taking a public stance on social issues?

Formative Performance Task

Complete a Venn Diagram that documents the risks of celebrities who take public stances.

Featured Sources

Source A: “Muhammed Ali Refuses Army Induction”

Source B: “How the Black Power Protest at the 1968 Olympics Killed Careers”

Source C: “Nike, Jordan endure share of controversy”

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Does celebrity require social responsibility? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that answers the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTENSION Create a social media post that responds to a recent cause championed by a celebrity.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Research an issue or social problem that holds personal significance. ASSESS Identify any celebrities, politicians, or public figures who has spoken out about that issue. ACT Write and send a letter to a celebrity who has expressed a position on that issue.

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation that assesses the extent to which celebrities and public figures have a social responsibility to give back to the communities and take stances on controversial issues. The inquiry provides students with the chance to explore the current ways celebrities influence society and the risks those celebrities face when they take public stances on social issues. Although this compelling question is broad, the inquiry centers on Latinx and African American celebrities. This strategic use of sources is particularly useful in showing the ways that some minority groups in the United States can use their celebrity status to impact American society.

This inquiry highlights the following standards from the C3 Framework:

- D2.Civ.1.6-8. Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and the media in a variety of governmental and nongovernmental contexts.
- D4.1.6-8. Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

It is important to note that teachers implementing this inquiry may be helped by some prerequisite knowledge of Latinx and African-American studies, as well as knowledge of philanthropy efforts by celebrities in marginalized communities. However, teachers and students can fully participate in this inquiry without expertise in the topics brought up by the questions, tasks, and sources. This inquiry covers many different points in modern American social history, so teachers should be prepared to provide additional context, sources, and direct instruction to guide students through the questions, tasks, and sources.

Although this inquiry focuses on Latinx and African-American experiences, the compelling question is relevant to any time period, nation or culture. Likewise, the supporting questions are designed to be broad, highlighting the ways in which celebrities impact society and the inherent risks that accompany those actions. The supporting questions enable students to think about the compelling question in three different ways, widening the scope through which they may understand the extent to which celebrities are expected to be socially responsible.

Note: This inquiry is expected to take three to five 45-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question—*Does Celebrity Require Social Responsibility?*—students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

It is also important to note that responses to the compelling question should be argumentative, taking a clear position on the compelling question. Teachers should encourage students to rely on the evidence gathered during

the inquiry process to develop and support their arguments.

Context of the Inquiry

This inquiry was developed through a collaboration between C3Teachers and a team of Summit Learning curriculum fellows. This collection of inquiry projects was designed to meet the needs of states and districts, who are increasingly calling for the inclusion of ethnic and gender studies in their school curriculum. Schools need culturally relevant materials that represent the histories and experiences of the communities they serve. The focus on culturally relevant curriculum is an inclusive focus. Culture is not a thing that some people have and others do not. This project, and others in the collection, represent a diverse set of identities and perspectives.

Cognitive Skills

The Summit Learning Cognitive Skills Rubric is an assessment and instruction tool that outlines the continuum of skills that are necessary for college and career readiness. Cognitive Skills are interdisciplinary skills that require higher-order thinking and application.

The rubric includes 36 skills and 8 score levels applicable to students in grades 3 through 12. Through Summit Learning, students practice and develop Cognitive Skills in every subject and in every grade level. The use of a common analytic rubric for assessment of project-based learning allows for targeted, standards-aligned feedback to students and supports the development of key skills over time. For more information, see the Cognitive Skills rubric here: <https://cdn.summitlearning.org/assets/marketing/Cognitive-Skills-Document-Suite.pdf>

The inquiry highlights the following Cognitive Skills:

Summit Learning Cognitive Skills	
Argumentative Claim	Developing a strong opinion/ argument through clear, well-sequenced claims.
Counterclaims	Acknowledging and developing alternate or opposing positions.
Selection of Evidence	Using relevant and sufficient evidence to support claims.
Explanation of Evidence	Analyzing how the selected evidence supports the writer's statements (e.g., claims, controlling ideas).

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	Does celebrity require social responsibility?
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: Orlando, S. & Carroll, J. (2 September 2016). Why Is Colin Kaepernick Not Standing for the National Anthem? - video. <i>The Guardian</i>. News Video. Accessed from: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/video/2016/sep/02/why-colin-kaepernick-not-standing-national-anthem-video</p>

Staging Task

To stage the compelling question, students watch a video that documents the protest of NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. The video shows Kaepernick in his now famous kneeling protest of the national anthem—an act designed to draw attention to racism and police brutality in the United States. Teachers may implement this task by asking students to write down their initial thoughts about what they are viewing, and then lead them in a discussion that assesses the extent to which Kaepernick’s actions were responsible.

This video is not meant to be comprehensive in its assessment of Kaepernick and his actions, but instead is intended as an example of what taking responsibility might look like for a celebrity athlete. Teachers should be aware that some students may not be familiar with this protest and should be prepared to provide context. In addition, Kaepernick’s protest is still highly controversial. Thus, teachers may want to provide additional instruction on what civil discussion should look like in a classroom when discussing potentially divisive topics (e.g., discussion norms).

Staging the Compelling Question

Featured Source A

Orlando, S. & Carroll, J. (2 September 2016). Why Is Colin Kaepernick Not Standing for the National Anthem? - video. *The Guardian*. News Video. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/video/2016/sep/02/why-colin-kaepernick-not-standing-national-anthem-video>



*Screenshot from source. See full-text to access images and additional information.

Caption: Colin Kaepernick has recently come under heavy criticism for not standing during The Star-Spangled Banner in two preseason games. The San Francisco 49ers quarterback is protesting against American racial injustice and minority oppression.

Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question	How do celebrities give back to society?
Formative Performance Task	Create a detailed list that shows the various ways celebrities give back to society.
Cognitive Skills	Selection of Evidence: Students develop this skill by selecting relevant evidence in order to respond to the supporting question.
Featured Sources	Source A: Deflem, M. (2019). The New Ethics of Pop: Celebrity Activism Since Lady Gaga, in <i>Pop Cultures: Sconfinamenti Alterdisciplinari</i> , edited by Massimiliano Stramaglia. Lecce-Rovato, Italy: Pensa Multimedia. Book Excerpt.. Accessed from: https://deflem.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-new-ethics-of-pop-celebrity.htm
	Source B: 5 Latino Philanthropists Using Fame for Good. (25 September 2013). <i>Huffington Post</i> . Article Excerpts. Accessed from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/latino-philanthropists-_n_3989013 ; Interactive Slideshow available at : https://www.huffpost.com/entry/latino-philanthropists-_n_3989013?slideshow=true#gallery/5bae66bee4b006f4f1962d06/0
	Source C: Top 5 Black Celebrity Philanthropists of All Time! (n.d.). <i>The HBCU Foundation</i> , jasminec, (excerpts). Accessed at: https://thehbcufoundation.org/bcgs-top-5-black-celebrity-philanthropists-of-all-time/

Supporting Question 1 and Formative Performance Task

The first supporting question is: *How do celebrities give back to society?* This question enables students to explore the ways celebrities show social involvement. The sources for this question offer several examples of African-American and Latinx celebrities who give back to society through philanthropy and activism.

In this inquiry, the focus is on the experiences of African-American and Latinx celebrities. Although this focus is specific, it may be useful for teachers to spend some time discussing key terms like “philanthropy” and “activism.” Not all philanthropic efforts are equal, and not all activism bears the same public risk. In addition, minority philanthropy and activism have historically been critiqued differently than White efforts. Therefore, it is important for students to see the wide array of examples by which celebrities use their star power to support various causes.

The formative task is to create a detailed list of the ways in which celebrities have given back to society. Teachers can use a variety of close reading or source strategies to help students break down the featured sources.

- Teachers may also refer back to the idea of “responsibility” that was developed in the Staging Task portion of the inquiry.
- Teachers may ask: “How did this celebrity differ in her or his actions than Colin Kaepernick?” or “Was this celebrity judged in the same ways as Colin Kaepernick for speaking out?”
 - These questioning strategies create continuity between the Staging Task and the Formative Tasks.

Featured Sources

Although the sources require no specific background information, teachers should be prepared to provide cultural context to each source through other supporting documents or direct instruction. The following sources elaborate ways in which celebrities have given back to society. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A This source provides information on the levels of money given by celebrity activists of color.

SOURCE B This source is a specific look at the efforts of five Latinx philanthropists.

SOURCE C Featured Source C is a specific look at the efforts of five African-American philanthropists.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

Deflem, M. (2019). The New Ethics of Pop: Celebrity Activism Since Lady Gaga, in *Pop Cultures: Sconfinamenti Alterdisciplinari*, edited by Massimiliano Stramaglia. Lecce-Rovato, Italy: Pensa Multimedia. Book Excerpt.. Accessed from:
<https://deflem.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-new-ethics-of-pop-celebrity.htm>

Table 1. Billboard Social 50, Year-End 2017 (source: Billboard, 2017).

ARTIST	MUSICAL GENRE	ACTIVISM
BTS	K-Pop	Youth charity
Ariana Grande	Pop	Charities and activism
Justin Bieber	Pop	Youth charities
Shawn Mendes	Pop	Mental health
Maluma	Reggaeton	Foundation and charities
Demi Lovato	Pop	Gay rights and charities
Selena Gomez	Pop	UNICEF and charities
Miley Cyrus	Pop	Multiple charities
Rihanna	Pop	Foundation and more
Nicki Minaj	Hip Hop	Multiple donations

Table 2. Forbes Celebrity 100, July 2018 (source: Forbes, 2018).

CELEBRITY	OCCUPATION	ADVOCACY
Floyd Mayweather	Sports (boxing)	Foundation
George Clooney	Actor (movies)	Humanitarian work
Kylie Jenner	Personality (television)	Charity work
Judy Sheindlin	Judge (television)	Women mentoring
Dwayne Johnson	Actor (movies)	Children foundation
U2	Music (rock)	World justice
Coldplay	Music (rock)	Multiple charities
Lionel Messi	Sports (soccer)	Children's philanthropy
Ed Sheeran	Music (pop)	Multiple charities
Cristiano Ronaldo	Sports (soccer)	Multiple charities
Bruno Mars	Musician (pop)	Youth scholarship and more

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source B

5 Latino Philanthropists Using Fame for Good. (25 September 2013). *Huffington Post*. Article Excerpts. Accessed from:
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/latino-philanthropists-_n_3989013;
 Interactive Slideshow available at :
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/latino-philanthropists-_n_3989013?slideshow=true#gallery/5bae66bee4b006f4f1962d06/0

Latino celebrities in philanthropy

Juanes has always been active in philanthropic causes in his birthplace of Colombia. Juanes is especially passionate about helping victims of landmines, which resulted during Colombia’s civil war. He also founded the Mi Sangre Foundation, an organization to help needy Colombian children through the Education For Peace Program.

Rosario Dawson is co-founder of Voto Latino, an organization that seeks to empower Latino youth to achieve a positive change through the vote. It is a non-partisan organization with big civic engagement campaigns dedicated to bringing new voices into the political process.

Shakira is an internationally recognized celebrity who has room in her heart for her boyfriend, her baby, and her philanthropic efforts to help children in need in her native Colombia.

She was honored in 2011 as Person of the Year by the Latin Recording Academy for her career accomplishments as well as her leadership of the Pies Descalzos Foundation, a non-profit helping children in need in Colombia.

She also founded its sister foundation, the Barefoot Foundation, is a U.S. non-profit devoted to bringing quality education to children in need.

Recently, Shakira proposed a solution to bring quality education to every child in the U.S. through philanthrocapitalism — described as the practice in where you apply business methods to philanthropy and call upon the private sector to pick up where government leaves off.

George Lopez seems to also possess a serious face when it comes to philanthropic causes. He is the founder of The Lopez Foundation, dedicated to making a change for underprivileged children and their families. He was awarded with the Manny Mota Foundation Spirit Award and the Spirit of Liberty Award for his contributions and efforts to help the Latino community.

Eva Longoria’s philanthropic endeavors

Eva Longoria spends much of her free time in philanthropic work to make a difference in the Latino community. She is engaged with many organizations and projects like:

- Longoria is the spokesperson for PADRES Contra El Cancer (Parents Against Cancer), a nonprofit organization that tries to improve the lives of Latino kids who are sick with cancer. It does not stop at the child’s needs but also address the needs of the family supporting their son or daughter in whatever it is they need, from educational support to financial aid.
- She founded Eva’s Heroes, a charity focused on helping developmentally disabled children.
- She helped raise more than 20,000 for the Make-A-Wish foundation.
- She was co-chair for Obama’s fundraising committee, which through its fundraising, gave 170,000 dollars to the Friends of the American Latino Museum in support of Latino arts.

- In 2011, Longoria co-produced “The Harvest,” a documentary which shows the dire conditions of working migrant children.
- Longoria was also awarded the Latina Visionary and Community Empowerment Award at the 21st National Hispanic Women’s Conference by the Hispanic Women’s Corporation, in recognition of her contributions to the Latin community.
- She also got the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts’ Horizon Award, awarded to those who advance the presence of Latinos in TV or films, and the 2006 NHLI Mujer/Chair Award, for her significant contributions to the empowerment of the Hispanic community, along with some other awards thanking her for her commitment to the betterment of the Hispanic community.

There are, of course, many other Latino celebrities dedicating their time to help their communities back in their native countries or doing something to help Latinos in the U.S. For example, Adriana Lima works with the orphanage Caminhos da Luz (Way of Light) in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil and the Puerto Rican rappers of Calle 13 have a global campaign MTV EXIT to support Latin America and Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S.

Even Marc Anthony co-founded The Maestro Cares Foundation to support organizations in Latin America that work with disadvantaged children.

Latino celebrities all around U.S. are aiming to help to improve and empower our communities. We can all be inspired to follow in this spirit and make some positive changes within our own communities.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source C

Top 5 Black Celebrity Philanthropists of All Time! (n.d.). *The HBCU Foundation*, jasminec, (excerpts). Accessed at:
<https://thehbcufoundation.org/bcgs-top-5-black-celebrity-philanthropists-of-all-time/>

Oprah Winfrey; Since receiving her Oscar nomination for her debut film performance in “The Color Purple,” actress, multi-media mogul and philanthropist Winfrey has gone on to establish herself as one of the most influential and well-known figures in entertainment and philanthropy. With her net worth estimated over \$2.5 billion, Winfrey has been dedicated to supporting educational initiatives and raising awareness of issues that affect women and children, both in the United States and around the globe. In 2007 The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa opened, with 150 low-income seventh-and-eighth graders, the school now enrolls over 300 students. Its mission is to provide a nurturing educational environment for academically gifted girls who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. She has helped over 5,000 students receive their college education. Oprah has donated millions of dollars to various charities and organizations, with most of her money going to three foundations: The Angel Network, The Oprah Winfrey Foundation, and The Oprah Winfrey Operating Foundation. She has helped over 5,000 students go to college including over 100 Morehouse men who were featured on her final episode of the Oprah Winfrey show...

Michael Jackson; According to the 2000 Guinness Book Of World Records, Jackson supported more charities (39) that year, via money donations and sponsorships, than any other entertainer. Jackson’s financial contributions have helped in relief efforts in dilapidated regions throughout the world mainly providing clean drinking water, food and medical supplies. Jackson applied immense amounts of currency and time towards relief assistance for A.I.D.S. and cancer research, as well as to combat world hunger. In 1984, Jackson equipped a 19-bed-unit at Mount Senai New York Medical Center. This center is part of the T.J. Martell-Foundation for leukemia and cancer research. Later in the year, he visited the Brotman Memorial Hospital, where he had been treated when he was burned very badly during the producing of a Pepsi commercial. He donated all the money he received from Pepsi, \$1.5 million, to the Michael Jackson Burn Center for Children. In 1992, he established the Heal The World Foundation, whose work has included airlifting 6 tons of supplies to Sarajevo, instituting drug and alcohol abuse education and donating millions of dollars to less fortunate children...

Russell Simmons; Few other celebrities combine hip-hop and philanthropy as well Russell Simmons. The hip-hop icon, philanthropist, and entrepreneur, founded the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation and the Hip Hop Summit Action Network in an effort to get more young people involved in and exposed to the arts and social causes. Since being established the Rush Philanthropic has served over 700,000 urban youth, directed millions in funding, and established two arts exhibits and education facilities. He is a man who is outspoken on many causes, using his celebrity for good his work with anti-slavery charity, the *Somaly Mam Foundation*, which aims to help women who have been previously forced into sex slavery, and he was feted for his contributions at the organization’s gala in New York....

Tom Joyner; He is the “hardest working man in radio” is also the hardest working man for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Since 1998, the Tom Joyner Foundation has raised more than \$55 million to provide financial assistance to students attending HBCUs. The foundation also supports a variety of initiatives including the Arts as well as HIV/AIDS peer educator programs and increasing the number of certified instructors at the schools. Joyner has been an advocate for voter registration and throughout the year promotes voter registration over the air, on his website and during his live ‘Sky Shows’ broadcasts. To improve healthy living, Joyner holds a ‘Take a

Loved One to the Doctor Day' every April or September. On that day, he rallies families and friends to go to the doctor to get a check-up to prevent any health problems, and particularly treat any existing issues...

Muhammad Ali; has devoted his life to helping promote world peace, civil rights, cross-cultural understanding, interfaith relations, humanitarianism, hunger relief, and the commonality of basic human values. His work as an ambassador for peace began in 1985, when he flew to Lebanon to secure the release of four hostages. Ali also has made goodwill missions to Afghanistan and North Korea; delivered over \$1 million in medical aid to Cuba; traveled to Iraq to secure the release of 15 United States hostages during the first Gulf War; and journeyed to South Africa to meet Nelson Mandela upon his release from prison. In addition to his international efforts, Ali is equally devoted to helping charities at home. He has visited countless numbers of soup kitchens and hospitals, and helped organizations including the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Special Olympics. He also annually participates in Celebrity Fight Night, which generates funds for the Muhammad Ali Parkinson Center at Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Ali once said, "I've always wanted to be more than just a boxer. More than just the three-time heavyweight champion. I wanted to use my fame, and this face that everyone knows so well, to help uplift and inspire people around the world..."

Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question	What can celebrities accomplish by taking a public stance on social issues?
Formative Performance Task	Complete part of a Venn Diagram that documents the accomplishments of celebrities who take public stance.
Cognitive Skills	<p>Selection of Evidence: Students develop this skill by selecting relevant evidence in order to respond to the supporting question.</p> <p>Explanation of Evidence: Analyzing how the selected evidence supports the writer's statements (e.g., claims, controlling ideas).</p>
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: Sklaroff, L.R. (11 January 2018). For Black Celebrities Like Oprah, It's Impossible to be Apolitical. <i>The Conversation</i>. Featured Article (excerpts). Accessed from: https://theconversation.com/for-black-celebrities-like-oprah-its-impossible-to-be-apolitical-89863</p>
	<p>Source B: Boren, C. (7 September 2017). Colin Kaepernick Has Done More than Make a Statement, He Has Shown NFL players Their Power. <i>The Washington Post</i>. Featured Article (excerpts). Accessed from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2017/09/07/colin-kaepernick-has-done-more-than-make-a-statement-he-has-shown-nfl-players-their-power/</p>
	<p>Source C: Hing, J. (16 December 2010). Eva Longoria Wants the Senate to Pass the DREAM Act. <i>Colorlines</i>. Web Article. Accessed from: https://www.colorlines.com/articles/eva-longoria-wants-senate-pass-dream-act</p>

Supporting Question 2 and Formative Performance Task

The second supporting question is: *What can celebrities accomplish by taking a public stance on social issues?* The question conceptually moves the student from the broad action of “giving back” to the more specific goal of “accomplishments.” Teachers should note this key difference so that students pay attention to the *results* of celebrity actions. This question is meant to focus student thinking around the potential benefits of celebrity efforts to affect social issues and policy. The sources range from showing the broad cultural effects that celebrities can have on the thinking of the public to more specific political efforts made by celebrities to affect the policy-making process.

The formative task asks students to complete part of a Venn diagram that documents the accomplishments of celebrities who take stances on public issues. This task is meant to pair with the formative task for Supporting Question 3. It may be helpful for teachers to provide a pre-created Venn diagram to help students keep track of information they gather for both Supporting Questions 2 and 3:

Image 1: Example Venn Diagram



Featured Sources

The following sources provide students with examples of how celebrities have accomplished various social goals. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A The first source analyzes the impact that Oprah Winfrey has had on society by being politically outspoken.

SOURCE B The second source evaluates the unintended consequences of Colin Kaepernick’s protest on other NFL players.

SOURCE C Featured Source C documents the efforts of actor Eva Longoria’s support of legislation to protect “Dreamer” immigrants.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

Sklaroff, L.R. (11 January 2018). For Black Celebrities Like Oprah, It's Impossible to be Apolitical. *The Conversation*. Featured Article (excerpts). Accessed from: <https://theconversation.com/for-black-celebrities-like-oprah-its-impossible-to-be-apolitical-89863>

Oprah Winfrey's rousing Golden Globe speech has many speculating whether the media mogul will become a presidential candidate in 2020, with some pundits questioning the merits of another "celebrity" president.

But to equate Oprah with other "celebrity" politicians like Donald Trump and Arnold Schwarzenegger skirts the history of how black celebrities have long assumed political roles – often unintentionally – within the black community.

When it's viewed through this lens, the transition into politics for someone like Winfrey is more natural. Oprah, for her part, seems to understand the tremendous importance of high-profile blacks in American society. During her monologue, she became emotional when she described how, as a young girl, she watched Sidney Poitier receive the Cecil B. DeMille Award at the 1964 Golden Globes – "I'd never seen a black man being celebrated like that."

But the ability of black celebrities to symbolize hope and racial progress precedes Poitier. The black singers, actors and athletes of the 1930s and 1940s weren't simply entertainers; they were living proof that African-Americans didn't need to succumb to racist stereotypes, and could be treated with dignity, even deference. With structural racism embedded in the nation's social and economic fabric, this, in and of itself, was a political act...

Elevating the black cultural hero

By the time Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to seek a second presidential term in 1936, African-American voters had become an important demographic for the Democratic Party...Roosevelt still needed to figure out a way to reach out to the black community. So instead of passing legislation to correct racial inequality, his administration developed cultural programs that would employ large numbers of black men and women, and promote the skills and abilities of African-Americans.

For example, New Deal Arts programs included individuals such as Carlton Moss, Sterling Brown and Zora Neale Hurston to create books and plays that would depict African-Americans in sympathetic, humane ways. The Federal Writers' Project's American Guide Series, which Brown edited, highlighted the diversity of African-American communities and customs. The Federal Theater Project featured plays written and directed by black men and women that grappled with pressing racial issues.

This was a potent political tool; federal officials understood that African Americans would be deeply affected – as Winfrey later was when watching Poitier receive the DeMille Award – by seeing African Americans portrayed in more realistic and respectful ways.

A message of unity and freedom

The stakes became even greater as America entered World War II. Simmering racial tensions needed to be reconciled with America's democratic, anti-fascist ideals...

...no one was more central to this brand of propaganda than boxer Joe Louis.

In 1938, Louis had stunned the world by defeating German Max Schmeling. Geopolitically, it was a display of American superiority. But for African Americans it was a triumph over whites.

Unassuming and apolitical, Louis didn't ever talk about racial issues. Nonetheless, he became a hugely important

political figure.

Poet Maya Angelou wrote of Louis' victories as evidence that African Americans were the "strongest people in the world"; novelist Richard Wright described Louis' victories as "a fleeting glimpse ... of the heart that beats and suffers and hopes for freedom."

Recognizing Louis' profound appeal, the government quickly swooped in, employing him in the Army's Morale Division to boost patriotism among African-Americans during World War II.

As one government official noted in 1942, "It might be well to ask the questions as to who would draw the biggest audiences, Joe Louis or [NAACP Executive Secretary] Walter White. The answer is obvious."

During his 46 months in the Army, Louis partook in 96 exhibition fights in the U.S. and abroad as part of a troupe that included black boxers George C. Nicholson, Sugar Ray Robinson and George J. Wilson. He also appeared on posters and in films that promoted racial inclusion, such as "The Negro Soldier..."

The power of the stage

These federal efforts during the Great Depression and World War II are complicated. On the one hand, it could be argued that they represented a tokenistic appeal to African Americans in lieu of real social and economic change. On the other, there's no doubt that African Americans were given the opportunity to be themselves, be celebrated, and move beyond the demeaning stereotypes that had existed for decades.

In the postwar period, civil rights leaders challenged African-American celebrities to use their platform to promote racial equality. Some, like Muhammad Ali, famously called for change, while others were more reticent. But the political stance of these individuals may not have mattered as much as their visibility and success...

After centuries of degradation and discrimination, the accomplishments of African Americans...possessed a political resonance. Though they were reluctant to promote racial change, by succeeding in traditionally exclusionary industries, they nonetheless became political figures. They signaled to other African Americans that barriers could be broken down. Even if they weren't activists themselves, they inspired others to fight inequality.

As a black woman, Oprah Winfrey occupies a unique space in this legacy of cultural heroes. Though it remains to be seen whether her candidacy will become a reality, she knows the significance of her actions for people of color in the U.S. and around the world. At a time when black women remain marginalized, Oprah – media mogul, actress, philanthropist, tastemaker – embodies the American Dream. People still look to cultural figures as much as they look to politicians for inspiration.

As Oprah stated in her speech, her life and career demonstrate how "we can overcome."

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source B

Boren, C. (7 September 2017). Colin Kaepernick Has Done More than Make a Statement, He Has Shown NFL players Their Power. *The Washington Post*. Featured Article (excerpts).

Accessed from:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2017/09/07/colin-kaepernick-has-done-more-than-make-a-statement-he-has-shown-nfl-players-their-power/>

NFL players have never been particularly outspoken. There is a sport that discourages individuality and anything that might challenge the status quo. But now, emboldened by Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protest that began last summer, they are becoming increasingly aware of just how much power they have.

Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, did more than just make a personal statement about police brutality and social injustice, he started a national conversation that at times has become a heated debate. It may also have helped awaken players to the power of their own voices.

George Atallah, the assistant executive director of external affairs for the NFL Players Association, made that point Thursday after Kent Babb's story on Kaepernick was published by The Post. He reminded union members, "Here's to realizing your full power," highlighting a quote from an unnamed NFL owner interviewed by Babb. "The thing that he's done probably more effectively than any team community relations staff or owner or coach could do for other players," the owner said, "is [point out] that they do have the ability to affect the national dialogue."

And with that untapped ability comes great power, one that NFL owners have become accustomed to having tilted in their favor over the years. Increased awareness of social injustice and activism are helping players take back the narrative at a critical time as the union and league spar over player discipline and begin to jockey for position ahead of the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement in 2020. "I think that the likelihood of either a strike or a lockout is almost in '21 a virtual certainty," DeMaurice Smith, the union's executive director, told *Sports Illustrated* recently, a statement that shows how much is at stake for players on so many levels.

Even as the NFLPA urges players to speak up, Kaepernick has chosen to let his actions — and seemingly everyone else who has an opinion — do the talking. He has turned down interview requests, including one from Babb. Whether by his own design or just because of his activism, Kaepernick has come to symbolize much bigger things than football...

...Kaepernick, who has moved to New York since leaving the San Francisco 49ers in March, has spent his time fulfilling a pledge to donate \$1 million to organizations that fight oppression. On Thursday, he announced to 1.23 million followers on Twitter that he has given away \$900,000. Just don't expect him to be more visible. Babb writes that "he rarely appears in public and has in fact been asked by event organizers to not appear at rallies in his name..."

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source C

Hing, J. (16 December 2010). Eva Longoria Wants the Senate to Pass the DREAM Act. *Colorlines*. Web Article. Accessed from:
<https://www.colorlines.com/articles/eva-longoria-wants-senate-pass-dream-act>

Eva Longoria supports the DREAM Act. So, too does New York Mets second baseman Luis Castillo and actor America Ferrera, of *Ugly Betty* (a ColorLines favorite) fame. Oh, and Miami Sound Machine’s Emilio Estefan and New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

They all told the Senate so today in a letter addressed to Senate leaders and jointly signed by the National Council of La Raza and other Latino politicians and business leaders. “America cannot afford to lose another generation of young people who stand to contribute to its economic and social prosperity,” they said. “The beneficiaries of the ‘DREAM Act’ are our future teachers, nurses, and engineers...The Latino community is counting on Congress to come together and show its support for the future of these young people and the nation.”

The DREAM Act would allow undocumented youth who’ve lived in the country for at least five years and graduated from high school a chance to gain citizenship after a thirteen-year probationary period if they commit at least two years to higher education or the military. While it’s got bipartisan support behind it, and plenty of celebrity cheerleaders, as well, it faces stiff odds when it returns to the Senate floor, possibly next week.

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	What do celebrities risk by taking a public stance on social issues?
Formative Performance Task	Complete a Venn Diagram that documents the risks of celebrities who take public stances.
Cognitive Skills	<p>Argumentative Claim: Developing a strong opinion/ argument through clear, well-sequenced claims.</p> <p>Counterclaims: Acknowledging and developing alternate or opposing positions.</p>
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: “Muhammad Ali Refuses Army Induction in 1967,” ABC News. News Segment. Accessed from: http://abcn.ws/1TT7nYJ</p>
	<p>Source B: Blakemore, E. (22 February 2018). How the Black Power Protest at the 1968 Olympics Killed Careers. <i>History Stories</i>, History.com. Web Article (excerpts). Accessed from: https://www.history.com/news/1968-mexico-city-olympics-black-power-protest-backlash</p>
	<p>Source C: Haugh, D. (10 September 2009). Nike, Jordan Share Controversy. <i>Chicago Tribune</i>. News Article. Accessed from: https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/bulls/chi-10-jordan-5-nike-criticssep10-story.html#</p>

Supporting Question 3 and Formative Performance Task

The third supporting question is: *What do celebrities risk by taking a public stance on social issues?* This question focuses students' attention on the specific risks that celebrities have taken *and* the consequences that many minority celebrities have suffered. Teachers can use this question to reconnect students to the Staging Task, asking them to draw parallels between the celebrities depicted here and the consequences of Colin Kaepernick's protest.

The formative task asks students to complete the Venn diagram they began for Supporting Question 2. Doing so provides students with the chance to weigh the accomplishments made by celebrities with the risks they take. Teachers could further use the overlapping center of the diagram to point out the areas where risks may or may not outweigh the accomplishments of taking a public stance.

One of the sources is video based, so teachers can take time to create guided questions and/or show students ways to break down video sources in ways that are different from text-based sources. In addition, teachers should encourage students to begin to brainstorm possible answers to the compelling question based on what they know already.

Featured Sources

The following sources provide students with three examples of celebrities who have made a range of choices on whether or not to take public and risky stances on controversial issues. Teachers should feel free to add or provide additional examples/sources that complement the examples presented here.

SOURCE A The first source is a television news story that depicts boxer Muhammed Ali's refusal to join the military during the Vietnam War.

SOURCE B Source B is a look back at the consequences of African-American protests at the 1968 Olympics.

SOURCE C The last source is a news story that explores the reasons behind basketball star Michael Jordan's lack of public stance on the controversy over Nike's use of sweatshop labor.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

“Muhammad Ali Refuses Army Induction in 1967,” ABC News. News Segment. Accessed from: <http://abcn.ws/1TT7nYJ>



*Screenshot from video.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source B

Blakemore, E. (22 February 2018). How the Black Power Protest at the 1968 Olympics Killed Careers. *History Stories*, History.com. Web Article (excerpts). Accessed from: <https://www.history.com/news/1968-mexico-city-olympics-black-power-protest-backlash>

It's an iconic image: Two athletes raise their fists on the Olympic podium. The photograph, taken after the 200-meter race at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, turned African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos from track-and-field stars into the center of a roiling controversy over their raised-fist salute, a symbol of black power and the human rights movement at large.

But look in the photo and you'll see another man as well: silver medalist Peter Norman, a white Australian runner. Norman didn't raise his fist that day, but he stood with Smith and Carlos. Though his show of solidarity ended up destroying Norman's career, the three athletes' actions that day would be just one in a line of protests on the athletic stage.

Smith and Carlos, who had won gold and bronze, respectively, agreed to use their medal wins as an opportunity to highlight the social issues roiling the United States at the time. Racial tensions were at a height, and the Civil Rights movement had given way to the Black Power movement. African Americans like Smith and Carlos were frustrated by what they saw as the passive nature of the Civil Rights movement. They sought out active forms of protests and advocated for racial pride, black nationalism and dramatic action rather than incremental change.

It was only months after the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and protests against the Vietnam War were gaining steam as well. In the lead-up to the Olympics, Smith and Carlos helped organize the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a group that reflected their black pride and social consciousness. The group saw the Olympic Games as an opportunity to agitate for better treatment of black athletes and black people around the world. Its demands included hiring more black coaches and rescinding Olympic invitations to Rhodesia and South Africa, both of which practiced apartheid. Though the project initially proposed a boycott of the Olympics altogether, Smith and Carlos decided to compete in the hopes they could use their achievements as a platform for broader change.

Then, just 10 days before the opening of the Summer Games, an unarmed group of protesters assembled in Mexico City's Three Cultures Square to plan the next move of the growing Mexican students' movement. The Mexican government sent in bulldozers to disperse the thousands gathered, and troops fired into the crowd, massacring between four (the government's official count) and 3,000 students.

Carlos and Smith were deeply affected by these events and the plight of marginalized people around the world. "It was a cry for freedom and for human rights," Smith told *Smithsonian* magazine in 2008. "We had to be seen because we couldn't be heard."

The third man on the podium became part of the protest, too, albeit in a less direct way. Before winning silver, Norman was a working-class boy from Melbourne, Australia, born in 1942. His family members were devout members of the Salvation Army, an evangelical group connected with the charitable group better known to Americans. Part of that faith was the belief that all men were equal...

...Norman supported his fellow Olympians' protest, in part because of the intolerance he had witnessed in Australia. "Australia was not a crucible of tolerance," notes Steve Georgakis, a sports studies specialist from

Australia. “Norman, a teacher and guided by his Salvation Army faith, took part in the Black Power salute because of this opposition to racism and the White Australia Policy.”

As the athletes waited to go to the podium, Carlos and Smith told Norman that they planned to use their win as an opportunity to protest. Smith and Carlos decided to appear on the podium bearing symbols of protest and strength: black-socked feet without shoes to bring attention to black poverty, beads to protest lynchings, and raised, black-gloved fists to represent their solidarity and support with black people and oppressed people around the world...

...Carlos realized he had forgotten his gloves, and Norman suggested the American athletes share a pair. The Australian also asked how he could support his fellow medalists. They suggested he wear a badge for the Olympic Project for Human Rights. Norman didn't raise his fist, but by wearing the badge he made his stance clear.

As the American athletes raised their fists, the stadium hushed, then burst into racist sneers and angry insults. Smith and Carlos were rushed from the stadium, suspended by the U.S. team, and kicked out of the Olympic Village for turning their medal ceremony into a political statement. They went home to the United States, only to face serious backlash, including death threats.

However, Carlos and Smith were both gradually re-accepted into the Olympic fold, and went on to careers in professional football before retiring. Norman, meanwhile, was punished severely by the Australian sports establishment. Though he qualified for the Olympic team over and over again, posting the fastest times by far in Australia, he was snubbed by the team in 1972. Rather than allow Norman to compete, the Australians did not send a sprinter at all...

Norman died without being acknowledged for his contributions to the sport. Though he kept his silver medal, he was regularly excluded from events related to the sport. Even when the Olympics came to Sydney in 2000, he was not recognized. When Norman died in 2006, Carlos and Smith, who had kept in touch with Norman for years, were pallbearers at the Australian's funeral.

It took until 2012 for the Australian government to apologize for the treatment Norman received in his home country. But even though it cost him his career and much of his happiness, Norman would have done it over again. “I won a silver medal,” he told the New York Times in 2000. “But really, I ended up running the fastest race of my life to become part of something that transcended the Games...”

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source C

Haugh, D. (10 September 2009). Nike, Jordan Share Controversy. *Chicago Tribune*. News Article. Accessed from:
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/bulls/chi-10-jordan-5-nike-criticssep10-story.html#>

The match made in sports marketing heaven has been a marriage like any other, for better or for worse.

Most prominent among the rough spots were the reports that Nike used sweatshops in Indonesia. In 1996, human-rights and labor advocates demanded that Nike improve pay and conditions for its workers.

Nike said it subcontracted its work and had no control over how the workers were treated, although it said it had tried to improve conditions.

But Michael Jordan only fueled the fire with a response that infuriated his critics.

During the 1996 NBA Finals, when asked about the alleged abuse of child workers, Jordan said: "I think that's Nike's decision to do what they can to make sure everything is correctly done. I don't know the complete situation. Why should I? I'm trying to do my job."

No matter how many press releases Nike churned out to document the millions invested in continuing education and low-interest loans in those underprivileged countries, Jordan, as Nike's biggest attraction, remained the focal point of criticism.

Likewise, many consider Jordan's iconic Jumpman as a symbol for greed in sports. Jordan's Hall of Fame exhibit already has been panned for having too much Nike, not enough Mike.

To those most critical of Jordan, every shoe sold under his name takes him one step further from his social responsibility.

Howard White, vice president of marketing for Jordan Brand, and those close to Jordan have heard the charge often—and scoff every time.

"You always hear Michael doesn't give back to the community," White said with a sigh. "But to me he makes some of the boldest social statements in the world: show up for work, be on time and be accountable for your job."

Jordan's success also created unexpected consequences.

The unprecedented annual demand for each new design of the Air Jordan sneakers elevated the shoes to such status symbols in many American cities that youths were using any means to get a pair, including violence. Fame had never felt so conflicting to Jordan than when he considered kids were literally dying to wear his shoes.

"People started robbing each other for the shoes, and it bothered him," said Tinker Hatfield, Nike's vice president of innovation and the primary designer for the Air Jordan line. "We were all sad, but it was much more a comment on materialism and people not respecting life. There was something else in our society driving that behavior so we never felt guilty or responsible or thought we would dial back and do less cool stuff, and Michael was adamant about that."

Summative Performance Task	
Compelling Question	Does celebrity require social responsibility?
Formative Performance Task	Construct an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.
Cognitive Skills	<p>Argumentative Claim: Students apply this skill by using evidence-based claims to develop a clear argument stance in response to the compelling question. Students’ argumentative claims will clearly show the structure through which they will respond to the compelling question.</p> <p>Counterclaims: Acknowledging and developing alternate or opposing positions.</p> <p>Selection of Evidence: Using relevant and sufficient evidence to support claims.</p> <p>Explanation of Evidence: Students will use evidence from their resources to support the claim they have made about whether school desegregation has been successful.</p>

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined supporting questions that explore the methods of celebrity philanthropy and activism, as well as the risks and accomplishments of those efforts. Each supporting question is designed to provide students with examples from African-American and Latinx social history in order to construct a response to the compelling question. In the formative tasks, they record their findings using a Venn diagram. Students then use this work to build and support their arguments.

Students should demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support emerging understandings. This final step requires them to create an argument through writing, debate, or some other venue. In this instance, students’ arguments should show variation as each individual grapples with the definition of what it means to be a responsible celebrity.

Argument Stems

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Although there are risks in supporting social causes and activism, having the status of a celebrity requires a person to be socially responsible. This conclusion is due to the fact that celebrities can have a broader impact than “ordinary” individuals. Many celebrities can accomplish far more due to their celebrity power and status.
- Although many celebrities can and do act to support social causes, they are not required to be responsible for any causes as taking public stances on certain issues can harm their credibility and careers.
- Celebrities have more influence and power than ordinary individuals. However, with that power comes important and powerful risks that could impact celebrities differently depending on the issue at hand and who they are. Therefore, celebrities have an important responsibility, but may not always be able to take action.

To support students in their argument making, teachers should model how each supporting question builds on the others to construct different ways of answering the compelling question. Teachers should encourage students to use their evidence to support their thinking, pushing them to construct arguments that are clear, accurate, well-reasoned, and evidence based.

EXTENSION To extend their arguments, students have the opportunity to create a social media post (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) responding to a social cause championed by a celebrity of their choice. Teachers should be sure to see that all posts are school appropriate. Teachers can also require students' posts include evidence that supports their points.

Taking Informed Action	
Action Question	Does celebrity require social responsibility?
Civic Theme	CARE: Students act responsibly to promote the common good.
Action Task	Write and send a letter to a celebrity who has expressed a position on that issue.
Cognitive Skills	Making Connections and Inferences: Students will demonstrate this skill by connecting ideas and making inferences based on evidence and reasoning.

Structure of Taking Informed Action

Taking informed action tasks have three steps to prepare students for informed, reasoned, and authentic action. The steps ask students to (1) *understand* the issues evident from the inquiry in a larger and/or current context; (2) *assess* the relevance and impact of the issues; and (3) *act* in ways that allow students to demonstrate agency in a real-world context.

For this inquiry, students have the opportunity to take action by adding their voices to current conversations about celebrity activism and philanthropy.

UNDERSTAND Students conduct research on a social issue or cause of personal importance. They explore the philanthropy and activism (or lack thereof) of a particular celebrity in regards to that issue.

ASSESS Students assess the efforts of celebrities in addressing the issue the student has chosen. Students compare the efforts of the celebrities each of them has chosen.

ACT Students can write a letter to a celebrity of their choice agreeing or disagreeing with the celebrity's stance and/or actions related to the particular cause. Teachers should encourage students to send these letters noting that, although they may or may not receive responses, this task allows students to demonstrate the power of their own agency as "ordinary" citizens. Teachers can use the letters as a way to further assess the abilities of students to organize evidence into well-reasoned positions.

CIVIC THEME This task reflects the civic theme of *care building*. When students engage in care building tasks, they recognize their social responsibilities and seek to help others, mitigate harm, and promote the common good. By researching and evaluating a way in which celebrities are practicing social responsibility, students surface activism (or lack thereof) and advocate for others in privileged positions to promote the common good.

Note about Ways to Take Informed Action

This inquiry has a *suggested* taking informed action task. Teachers and students are encouraged to revise or adjust the task to reflect student interests, the topic/issue chosen for the task, time considerations, etc.

Taking informed action can manifest in a variety of forms and in a range of venues. They can be small actions (e.g., informed conversations) to the big (e.g., organizing a protest). For this project, students may instead express action by creating a public service announcement (as noted in the bulleted point below “Act”), organizing a panel discussion, conducting a survey and the like; these actions may take place in the classroom, the school, the local community, across the state, and around the world. What’s important is that students are authentically applying the inquiry to an out-of-classroom context. Actions should reach people outside of the classroom.

For more information about different ways students can take action, see: Muettterties, C. & Swan, K. (2019). Guiding Taking Informed Action Graphic Organizer. *C3Teachers*. Available from: <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/civic-action-project/>.