

Teacher Guide - *Patsy Mink: Ahead of the Majority*

OVERVIEW

This lesson plan is designed for use in conjunction with *Patsy Mink: Ahead of the Majority*, a one-hour documentary by filmmaker Kimberlee Bassford.

The film explores the life and career of the late U.S. Representative **Patsy Takemoto Mink**, the **first woman of color** elected to Congress and co-author of **Title IX**, a landmark legislation that mandated gender equity in education and athletics. Petite in frame but a giant in vision and her quest for social justice, Mink tirelessly championed the rights of minorities, women, workers, the poor and disenfranchised throughout her more than 40 years of public service. As a Japanese-American woman, she parlayed experiences of racism and sexism into an unwavering commitment to civil rights, equal opportunity, education and peace. While her bold and outspoken character often left her on the fringe of the political establishment, she never compromised her beliefs. Her **unimpeachable integrity** and **political courage** were legend in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Patsy Mink: Ahead of the Majority reveals how this passionate woman broke through barriers, opened opportunities to women and minorities and engaged the political process to permanently alter the American social and cultural landscape.

OBJECTIVES

This lesson provides students with the opportunity to develop their writing, speaking, listening, research, and critical thinking skills. In terms of content, students will:

- Evaluate the meaning of citizenship, representation and the importance of voting
- Assess the role of political campaigns in a democracy
- Assess the role of political parties and explore the ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans
- Analyze the role of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and understand the differences between the two legislative branches
- Learn about the history of political representation of minorities in the U.S. and the civil rights movement
- Learn about the history of the women's movement in the U.S.



U.S. Rep. Patsy Mink standing on the Capitol steps
(photo credit: Dev O'Neill)

- Evaluate the impact of World War II and the Vietnam War on American attitudes towards patriotism and inclusion
- Analyze disparities between American ideals and realities
- Understand the myriad forms of civic participation at the local, state, and national levels and the ways in which citizens can influence public policy
- Gain skills they can use to analyze and evaluate media information

SUBJECT AREAS

Civics / Government
 Social Studies
 U.S. History

GRADE LEVELS

9 – 12

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

3 class periods, plus homework preparation

MATERIALS

- DVD of *Patsy Mink: Ahead of the Majority* and viewing equipment
- Internet access for student research
- Copies of the U.S. Constitution

BACKGROUND

Patsy Takemoto Mink always wanted to be a doctor. As a young child growing up on a Maui sugar plantation, she watched her family doctor make his rounds and admired his ability to heal and comfort people. She knew she wanted to help people too. She studied hard in high school and college and applied to more than a dozen medical schools. Despite her stellar grades, high test scores and strong extra curricular activities, she was rejected from every one. The reason: her gender.

Today when children are asked what they want to be when they grow up, they answer with abandon, revealing whatever whim, dream or desire lies in their hearts. However, when Patsy Takemoto Mink was born in 1927, opportunities for girls were limited. Few graduate schools accepted women. When Mink first entered the U.S. Congress in 1965, she was one of just twelve women, out of 535 Congressional members. Up until then, only 73 women had served in the entire history of the Congress. To most Americans, the woman's place was in the home.

Through her leadership, tenacity and sheer will, Mink helped change this restrictive view of women. As the first woman of color in the U.S. Congress, she represented an important opportunity for historically disenfranchised segments of the American population to have a voice in national politics. Moreover, Mink fought tirelessly in Congress to elevate the lives of women, minorities, workers and the poor. One of her most significant accomplishments is co-authoring Title IX (later renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act), which requires gender equity in educational institutions receiving federal funds. The legislation had a tremendous impact in expanding educational and athletic opportunities for girls and women.



Patsy Mink being sworn into the U.S. House of Representatives in 1965 by House Speaker John William McCormack (D-MA) (photo credit: Gwendolyn Mink)

This lesson plan is designed to help students explore the historical significance of Mink's election as a minority woman to a national office and the challenges she faced throughout her more than 40 years in public service. The class exercises will also help students explore definitions of citizenship, civic participation and patriotism and understand how political campaigns are run and legislation passed. In addition, the lesson seeks to raise students' awareness of the disparities that exist between American ideals of inclusion and equal opportunity with the realities of racial and sexual discrimination in 20th century America.

ACTIVITY

Procedure

Establish a framework for understanding the issues by watching the documentary and reviewing the content in this lesson plan.

Students will do a preliminary homework assignment before viewing the film. The film will then be screened over two class periods.

The first half hour of the film will be screened on Day 1. The concluding half hour of the film will be shown on Day 2. Students will participate in a 10-minute writing assignment after each viewing. Day 3 will be devoted to classroom discussion.

Before Viewing the Documentary

Prior to the first class screening of the film, ask students to write down the answers to the following questions. They may refer to their history or social studies textbooks, the U.S. Constitution or the internet for information.

1. **Structure of Congress.** What are the differences between the Senate and House of Representatives? According to the U.S. Constitution, what qualifications must a Senator or Representative meet?
2. **Making Laws.** How are laws made and passed in Congress? What role does the president have in enacting legislation?
3. **Elections.** What is the difference between primary and general elections? Who is eligible to vote?

More information can be found at these websites:

- *U.S. Constitution Online*, <http://www.usconstitution.net/constkids.html>
- *Ben's Guide to the US Government for Kids*, <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/election/index.html>
- *Congress for Kids*, <http://congressforkids.net/index.htm>

Viewing the Documentary

While students watch the documentary over two class periods, require them to take notes on the following topics to prepare for the writing assignments and discussion to follow:

- discrimination Mink faced because of her gender or race
- political maneuvering within the Hawai'i Democratic Party and its effect on Mink
- the ways in which Mink voiced her opinion or took a stand on an issue
- the role of the media in covering Mink

After Viewing the Documentary

In order to prepare for discussion, have students engage in 10-minute writing exercises after each viewing. Ask students to write down their responses to the following:

After the first screening:

“Patsy Takemoto Mink faced **gender** and **racial** discrimination throughout her life. What are some of the differences between gender discrimination and racial discrimination? What are some similarities?”

After the second screening:

“Patsy Takemoto Mink’s election to the United States Congress in 1964 was more than symbolic. It made a true difference in the political history of this nation by allowing the voice of women and minorities, long disenfranchised, to be heard in the national debate on issues. In what ways was Mink’s voice unique from other Congressional members’? Discuss some of Mink’s accomplishments in Congress and what you see as her lasting legacy.”

Guiding Questions for the Discussion

1. How did Mink’s family background and childhood on a Maui sugar plantation influence how she saw herself and her position in the world?
2. How did World War II impact Mink? How did it affect Japanese Americans specifically and Asian American identity more generally?
3. What obstacles did Mink face because of her race and gender? How did she respond to these challenges?
4. What were the prevailing attitudes toward women in early to mid 20th century America? In what ways did Mink fit or break the mold of the “ideal woman”? In what ways did her gender affect how she was perceived as a politician?

5. Mink never had a large campaign organization. Rather her campaigns were run by relatives and friends and relied on grassroots support. Why was Mink successful in her elections? What did she bring to the table that other candidates did not?
6. Despite Mink's successful elections to the U.S. House, Hawai'i State and Territorial Legislature and Honolulu City Council, Mink's dream of being a U.S. Senator eluded her. What were some of the reasons for her political losses? What role did the Hawai'i Democratic Party play in these losses?
7. How did Mink define her role as a U.S. Representative? What did she consider to be her duty as a Congressional member, as a representative of her constituents and as a citizen? What did she consider to be the role of government?
8. During the Vietnam War, Mink was sometimes called un-American for her protest of the war. How did Mink define ideas like democracy, civic participation and patriotism? Do you agree with her definitions?
9. How has Title IX (renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act) changed the American political, social and cultural landscape? What can girls and women do now that they couldn't prior to Title IX? How have you personally benefited from this legislation?



Patsy Mink campaigning for re-election in 1996 (photo credit: Gwendolyn Mink)

10. Mink fought hard in Congress for more funding for public education. Why is public education important? What are some of the needs of public schools today?
11. Mink is known for her commitment to women, minorities and education. What other issues did she champion? What stands did she take on poverty, national security and civil liberties?

12. How did the media depict Mink? In what ways did the media help or hurt her political career?
13. How do you think Mink would have viewed today's world and the current state of race relations, women's rights, public education and U.S. foreign policy? What would she be fighting for today?

ASSESSMENT

Consider the following opportunities for assessment:

- Grade the students for completion of the homework assignment
- Grade the students for participation in class discussion
- Evaluate the written assignments according to a rubric designed by the teacher

Some points to consider:

- Have students presented multiple perspectives in an objective way?
- Have students made a persuasive case for why they favor one perspective over another?
- Have students included explicit criteria in their presentation or written assignments for the basis of their stand on any given issue?
- Have students demonstrated an awareness of the competing claims that different people or groups can make on an issue?
- Have students demonstrated understanding of how government is structured and how it operates?
- Have students evaluated the credibility of information gathered on the web? Have they taken initiative to follow up in reference books, printed books and articles?

EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to write a research paper on the history of the disenfranchisement of women and minorities in the United States. What is the history of voting rights for these groups? What developments in the civil rights and women's movement led to the groups gaining the right to vote? How did these developments change the face of U.S. politics?
2. The United States has never had a female President or Vice President. And since the nation's founding, only 1.8% of the individuals serving in the U.S. Congress have been women. Ask students to write a research paper about the history of women in national political office. What barriers exist to women gaining entry to national office? What challenges do they face once there?
3. Ask students to write a biography of a female politician, either past or present, at any level of government (local, state or national). Describe her background, motivations, political campaigns and experiences in office. What issues did she champion?

4. Ask students to write a paper comparing and contrasting public opinion during World War II and the Vietnam War and how the two wars affected gender and race relations in the nation.
5. Ask students to write a personal essay on an act of discrimination they experienced. Describe the experience. How did they feel? How did they respond? What did they learn from it? What would they do today if they were faced with the same situation?
6. Invite a politician or activist, particularly someone who may have broken a racial or sexual barrier, to visit the class and share his or her experiences.
7. Ask students to debate the passage of Title IX. Assign students roles as Senators and Representatives, Democrats and Republicans, and have them present their arguments for and against Title IX.

WMM

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES
462 BROADWAY, SUITE 500
NEW YORK, NY 10013
TEL 212.925.0606
FAX 212.925.2052
WWW.WMM.COM