



A RIGHT TO THE CITY

August 21, 2019

Dear Teachers,

We are excited to offer your students a way to call into our storytelling system, and hear primary source stories. Our project seeks to go beyond museum walls, including DC libraries and schools. The stories are already featured in the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum exhibition, “A Right to the City” (scheduled to reopen October 2019 and to run through summer 2020).

The storytelling system can be dialed from any phone (cell or landline). It is free to use. Right now we feature five stories from the current exhibition.

Exhibition focus: “A Right to the City” is about the history of neighborhood change and neighborhood activism in Washington, DC. After a half-century of population decline and disinvestment, Washington, DC, today is home to a rapidly growing population, rising rents and home prices, major new development projects, but also deepening inequality. “A Right to the City” explores more than five decades of neighborhood change in the nation’s capital as well as the rich history of organizing and civic engagement that accompanied it. Highlighting six neighborhoods across the city—Adams Morgan, Anacostia, Brookland, Chinatown, Shaw, and Southwest—the exhibition tells the story of how ordinary Washingtonians have helped shape and reshape their neighborhoods in extraordinary ways: through the fight for quality public education, for healthy and green communities, for equitable development and transit, and for a genuinely democratic approach to city planning.

Possible class assignments

- A. All students are assigned to dial the hotline from home, listen to a story (2-3 minutes in length), and craft a reflection/poem, draw or paint a personal response, etc.
- B. During class, the teacher dials the hotline using a speakerphone (or bluetooth speaker connected to their own phone). Listen to one story, have a discussion.
- C. Write a “before or after” creative writing piece, imagining what is happening beyond the frame of the audio story you hear



Possible learning goals

- Consider how art history intersects with the history of neighborhood organizing in DC
- Hear about the historical developments in Washington, DC, during the 20th Century
- Learn about the struggles that men and women have faced in overcoming political oppression, economic exploitation, religious persecution, and racial injustice.
- Describe efforts to overcome discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, and education in the District, and explain the local and national effects of these efforts
- Identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations
- Interact directly with primary source materials to gather relevant information
- Think critically and assess the strengths and limitations of primary source materials in terms of task, purpose, and audience

We hope that you will find our storytelling system beneficial and can integrate it into your classrooms. If you would like to learn more about our system and the exhibition, visit <https://dc.storytelling.city/>

Sincerely,

Dr. Benjamin Stokes (bstokes@american.edu), American University School of Communication and Project Lead for the DC Storytelling System

