

# DREAM OF A NATION

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## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Common Core Alignment Creating Awareness through Action Oriented Writing and Research

An increasing amount of information is transmitted through visual literacy—a skill required of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. This unit plan combines traditional literacy with visual literacy to make students aware of contemporary issues and advocate for practical solutions. Students will read and watch to educate themselves on topics related to social, environmental and economic issues. Then, they will identify business, community and governmental solutions to this problem. They will write three letters: to the editor of a community newspaper, the CEO of a corporation and their local or national elected officials.

This in-depth unit plan is aligned to English Language Arts Common Core Standards for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and utilizes the rich resources in *Dream of a Nation*. *Dream of a Nation* is a high Lexile level (1340), non-fiction text which aptly supports the Common Core emphasis on text range, quality and complexity. The standards addressed are the following:

### Common Core Information Reading Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

### Common Core Writing Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1a Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1b Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1c Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1d Establish and maintain a formal style.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grade 8 [here](#).)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.9b** Apply *grade 8 Reading standards* to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”).

### Common Core Language Standards:

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1b** Form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1d** Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.\*

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.2** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.2a** Use punctuation (comma, ellipsis, dash) to indicate a pause or break.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.2b** Use an ellipsis to indicate an omission.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.2c** Spell correctly.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.6** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

### Learning Outcomes:

- Students will gain understanding of a topic related to a current social, political, environmental or economic issue found in *Dream of a Nation*.
- Students will further explore this topic through the viewing of one or more documentary films on the subject.
- Students will complete further research on the topic independently, take effective notes on the topic, and develop an action plan for business, consumers and the government in order to tackle this issue effectively.
- Students will write letters to the company, local and national officials and a letter to the editor of the local newspaper in which they detail their research and their proposed solution. These letters will differ in respect to the intended audience and the scope and method of the proposed solution.

### Teacher Planning:

This is a unit plan. Depending on length of class time and student reading and writing ability this unit can take from two to five weeks. Students will read between one and three articles from *Dream of a Nation*. Strategies for helping students understand readings are located in the [teacher resources section of our website](#).

### Unit Plan: Action and Awareness

#### 1.1 Define the problem

Students will be made aware of a current social, economic or environmental issue through reading one to three articles in *Dream of a Nation* and watching a documentary on the topic. The following is a list of documentaries and their topically aligned chapters and articles in *Dream of a Nation*. Teachers can select one issue for the whole class or students can choose their own issue and watch the film independently. Teachers can also show multiple films in class if time permits.

Gasland	Chapter 6 & Chapter 2
Walmart: The High Cost of Low	Chapter 3, Chapter 8 & Chapter 9

Price	
Fog of War	Chapter 11 & <i>Redefining Security for Strong Communities and a Safer World, Reallocating Military Spending, Taking Care of Soldiers and Increasing National Security</i>
The Yes Men	Chapter 3 & Chapter 9
Atomic Café	Chapter 11 & <i>A Green Energy Future Without Expanding Nuclear</i>
Supersize Me	<i>Strengthening the Food and Health Connection, Key Steps for a Healthy Nation</i>
Food Inc.	<i>The Next Generation of Family Farming, Creating Food Security, Improving Health, Creating Community</i>
Gideon's Army	<i>Reforming Prisons, Saving Billion, Creating Opportunity &amp; Ending Poverty in America</i>
Sicko	<i>Tackling the Profit Problem in Healthcare &amp; Redefining Security for Strong Communities and a Safer World</i>
Waiting for Superman	Chapter 5
Outfoxed	Chapter 4
Inside Job	Chapter 3, Chapter 9 & <i>Getting Money out of Politics: Putting the Public First</i>
Fuel	Chapter 6
No Impact Man	Chapter 2
The Garden	<i>Transforming Urban Injustice into Beauty and Empowerment, Creating Food Security, Improving Health, Creating Community, The Next Generation of Family Farming</i>
A Snow Mobile for George	Chapter 1, Chapter 2 & Chapter 6
The Last Mountain	Chapter 2 & Chapter 6
The Times of Harvey Milk	<i>Envisioning an Inclusive World</i>
American Blackout	Chapter 1, <i>Everyone a Changemaker</i>
The Canary Effect: Kill the Indian Save the Man	<i>Supporting a Green Future in Native American Communities, Realizing our Roots and the Power of Interconnectedness</i>

As students read and watch they should take notes on what they need to know in order to understand the problem/ explain the problem/ solve the problem. Have them take notes on the [Action Notes](#) handout.

### 2.1 Explore Current Action

Have students go to the Solutions and Actions page of the Dream of a Nation website: <http://dreamofanation.org/solutions/>. They should select the chapter of the book that contains the article they are using to launch their research. Click on the hotlink for their particular article. On this page students will find videos, partner organizations that tackle the issue and other articles. Students can find information on work already being done on these issues through researching these organizations. These solutions can be added to the second page of the [Action Notes](#) handout.

### 3.1 Purpose and Audience

Discuss with students with idea of purpose and audience. They should use the [Audience and Purpose](#) handout to take notes and guide them through. The purpose of their letters is to inform and persuade. In order to accomplish these tasks writers use a combination of the three main strategies of rhetorical appeal:

- Logos or the appeal to reason relies on logic or reason. (Use of statistics which support a claim, evidence of why the problem is an issue)
- Ethos or the ethical appeal is based on the character, credibility, or reliability of the writer. (Their personal experiences of being affected by the problem)
- Pathos, or emotional appeal, appeals to an audience's needs, values, and emotional sensibilities. (Using examples of people being adversely affected by the problem)

The class should discuss examples of these strategies found in the *Dream of a Nation* articles and documentaries.

The specific combination of appeals used should be determined by the audience. Local audiences who will read the letter to the editor will succumb to claims of Pathos more so than corporate CEOs who are disconnected to the communities they're affecting. Remind students that there are three basic types of audiences:

- o Sympathetic audiences should be bolstered and arguments should be a rallying cry.
- o Neutral audiences should be given information in an attempt to sway them.
- o Hostile audiences should be given information in an attempt to make them acknowledge that your side at least has some truth to it.

The class should discuss which type of audience each recipient will likely be.

#### **4.1 Lettering Writing**

Once students have completed their [Action Notes](#) and [Audience and Purpose](#) handouts they should use these to help them complete their letters. Have them use the [Letter Template](#) to format their letters correctly. Each student should write three letters that appeal to the three different audiences.

#### **5.1 Mailing and Publishing**

Students should find addresses for the CEO, their local newspaper and local and national officials online. Students and teachers can decide whether to use email or snail mail to deliver these letters.

#### **6.1 Evaluation**

Student work can be evaluated using our [Letter Rubric](#). Make a bulletin board of student letters to show off or have the students read them aloud to their peers.

Please send *Dream of a Nation* examples of your students' finished research projects and suggestions for improvement of our Unit Plan. We appreciate your feedback and insights.