



## ***Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard***

### **Lesson Plan**

Authors: Tyler Herman, Teaching Artist at Ford's Theatre Society; Tricia Patrick, Ford's Theatre Society; Ashley Gunter, Ford's Theatre Society

**Grade Level: 6-12**

**Length: Three 55-minute classes**

### **Introduction:**

Maynard Holbrook Jackson, Jr. was a boundary-breaking African American mayor of Atlanta, Georgia in the mid-1970s and early 1990s. Pearl Cleage commemorates Jackson's legacy and unique place in our nation's history through her play *Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard*. Jackson faced numerous challenges as he served Atlanta, including issues with race relations, sanitation, public housing and crime. As we hear the account of Jackson's inspiring rise to power, we also hear of the difficulties he faced and could not surmount. As the character identified as The Witness states: "Maynard Jackson had to confront the limits of what a mayor could do and then make peace with his legacy."

These lessons aim to equip students with the necessary skills to identify the local problems that concern the residents of D.C. in Lesson One, effectively summarize and persuasively articulate those issues in Lesson Two and ultimately champion those issues in Lesson Three. The lessons build on each other in teaching students the skills for identifying, articulating and advocating for the needs of their community. The ultimate goal is to foster a sense of civic responsibility within students and encourage them to become active and vocal members of their community.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. By working in collaborative groups, students will be able to identify various mayoral campaign issues after reviewing the city's budget.
2. After researching and learning about issues facing D.C. residents, students will identify and rank three important issues.
3. Students will role play and elect a mayor after the town hall debate.
4. Students will devise a one-minute public testimony to address an issue and offer a resolution directly to the Mayor on People's Day.
5. By working in collaboration with their cabinet, the Mayor will propose solutions in response to citizens demands through facilitated conversations on People's Day.

## Guiding Questions:

1. What are the qualities of a good leader?
2. What are the characteristics of an engaged citizen?
3. How can everyday citizens make informed voting decisions?
4. What does it look like when you're an active participant in your community?
5. What are the challenges of being a mayor?
6. What is power and who does it belong to?

## Standards:

### Common Core History standards

- W.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question drawing on several sources and generating additional, related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- SL.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
- WHST.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration
- WHST.9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research

### C3 standards

- 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.  
D2.Civ.1.9-12: Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of local, state, tribal, national, and international civic and political institutions.
- D2.Civ.10.6-8: Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.  
D2.Civ.10.9-12: Analyze the impact and the appropriate role of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic

principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

- D2.Civ.11.6-8: Differentiate among procedures for making decisions in the classroom, school, civil society, and local, state, national government in terms of how civic purposes are intended.  
D2.Civ.11.9-12: Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.
- D2.Eco.1.6-8: Explain how economic decisions affect the well-being of individuals, business, and society.  
D2.Eco.1.9-12: Analyze how incentives influences choices that may result in policies with a range of costs and benefits for different groups.

## **Classroom Activities:**

**Lesson One: Who's Here**

**Lesson Two: "Of the People"**

**Lesson Three: People's Day**

### **Lesson One: Who's Here**

#### **Introduction (15 minutes)**

As students enter, the teacher may select to play some music to set the tone for a creative exploration. One style that may be fitting is Go-Go music because of its roots in D.C., or maybe something to remind the students they are a part of a local community. (For brief guidance on Go-Go: [D.C.s Go-Go Music: Essential Tracks and Artists](#) and [The Beat is Go-Go](#).)

Begin by explaining that the class will create a classroom simulation of a mini-city. The aim is to explore the issues that the citizens of its city face and how the local government can respond to those issues. Students will assume different roles, with some acting as concerned citizens while others will take on the part of the mayor and their cabinet. The citizens' job will be to identify issues affecting them and articulate them to the powers that be. The class should remember that individuals who express concerns may only sometimes have access to the full scope of information. It's crucial to listen to all perspectives and gather all available information before making decisions.

The mayor's job will be to listen to the citizens, determine priorities and offer solutions to the issues they raise. The class will focus on the problems affecting residents of Washington, D.C. The class will examine these decisions and find alternative solutions that would better serve the public.

Teachers have two options from which to build the discussion:

1. Invite students to share any issues or concerns they have witnessed or experienced in their local community. The teacher can record student contributions and categorize suggestions on the board into groups of similar issues.
2. Share D.C.'s [FY24 Budget Overview](#), page 6: Guiding Values and pages 8-9: Budget Investments.

## **Learning Activities**

### **Research (20 minutes)**

To begin the research, the students can divide themselves into a maximum of seven groups. Each group will focus on a particular topic within their chosen category of interest. They can select from Education, Recreation, Transportation, Public Housing, Public Safety, Health and Human Services, Government Operations and Infrastructure. To gather ideas, the FY24 Budget Overview provides examples of specific action items from these categories on pages 11 to 18.

Alternatively, students can use examples from their lives or relevant connections concerning their school environment and community. They can gather specific concerns through conversation and personal experience if internet access is unavailable. Each team should list five issues related to their discipline, ranking them in order of importance. Each team must take notes during this process, as they will refer to these issues later in the project.

### **Sharing (15 minutes)**

Each group will share what they found and three to five issues. Remember to highlight discoveries made during research, like "I had no idea X was an issue facing us" or "I had no idea Y was so complicated."

**Make sure to explain the EXIT activity before SHARING.**

### **Exit ticket/Assessment (5 minutes)**

After listening to all the issues shared by the groups, students will select their top two to three that concern them as citizens and rank them in order of importance. Students may create an alternate identity, such as a single parent working in a law firm or a retiree who has spent 30 years working as a dentist but now golfs.

## **Lesson Two: "Of the People"**

### **Introduction (10 minutes)**

Through this lesson, students will understand the importance of local government and how we can participate in the democratic process.

At the start of the session, play a selection of political ads to showcase how candidates communicate their key issues to the public. The links provided offer a wide selection of political ads to choose from: [Best Political Ads of All Time](#) and [10 Very Effective Political Ads](#). Once the class has watched the political ads, reflect on what the students noticed about the ads. How did the candidates articulate their strengths or weaknesses in comparison to their opponent? What made the music, imagery or campaign slogan choices convincing? What conversations or decisions were made to create the political ads?

Further explain that today, the students will elect a mayor of our town to represent us and with the issues researched in the last class so we better understand what our mayor will be responsible for. Students can pair-share or you can have a discussion as a class to review the previously explored issues.

## **Learning Activities**

### **What Makes a Mayor (5 minutes)**

The teacher asks the students for suggestions of what makes a good elected official. Students can also research articles about what makes a good mayor. Explain that because a mayor, congressperson, president, etc. must want to serve, that means they must have a mixture of audacity and generosity. They also have to be organized and personable and be able to manage many balls in the air.

### **Campaign Development (20 minutes)**

Who is interested in running for mayor? Remember that our classroom is a mini version of the city, so each candidate must represent themselves and be accountable for a diverse group of citizens. To create a campaign, each candidate will select a team of three individuals.

Instruct the students that: Your campaign should have a slogan, logo and platform encompassing a few reviewed issues. What are your main concerns? What issues are you passionate about? What do you want to improve? Remember, to win, you need to satisfy the majority of the people. It's also crucial to make it personal by addressing the issues that matter most to you.

The number of candidates should be based on your classroom's needs and abilities, but at least two and up to six candidates can work within your class's timeframe. Remember that in the USA, anyone can be a write-in candidate, and we are not limited to only two political parties.

The rest of the class represents impartial citizens. They will interrogate and evaluate each candidate's position and articulation of issues and ask probing questions. All citizens can prepare questions, or the class can collaborate and select representatives to present them during the town hall. Remember – you are trying to find the best mayor – someone who will work to serve your needs and embodies the qualities discussed earlier.

### **Debate (10 minutes)**

Conduct a town hall debate. The teacher will instruct each candidate to briefly present their platform and slogan. After all of the candidates have presented their platform, the citizen-students can begin to ask questions of the panel on their values and issues. Questions can be directed toward all or specific candidates. It is vital to have a teacher-moderator present to ensure a fair and organized debate. Encourage respectful communication, active listening from all participants, and note-taking from the citizen-students. The teacher can determine if each candidate is allowed a timed response to best keep the process moving along.

### **Election (5 minutes)**

Each candidate will receive one final opportunity to address the citizens with a 30-second impromptu speech that summarizes how they will serve the community as mayor.

Voting – There will be two rounds of voting. The teacher will serve as impartial proctor. Instruct everyone to close their eyes and raise their hand to cast the first-round vote for one candidate (or two, depending on how many candidates there are). The top two (or three) contenders should face off in a second-round vote, where everyone gets one vote. If there is a tie, the teacher can select that candidate (consider yourself the electoral college) and the winner is announced. Inform the mayor that in the next class, they will assemble their cabinet, who will work with them to resolve the issues that are presented during People's Day.

### **Exit ticket/Assessment (5 minutes)**

Instruct students to write about their aspirations for the mayor's accomplishments during their term and identify areas where they think the mayor may not meet expectations.

## **Lesson Three: People's Day**

### **Introduction (10 minutes)**

To create a welcoming and engaging classroom atmosphere, consider playing upbeat music as students enter. Choose something you've discovered in a previous lesson that resonates with your class.

Today, we'll discuss People's Day, a program pioneered by Maynard Jackson in Atlanta and described in *Something Moving*. On this day, the Mayor opened his office to the public, allowing them to ask questions and address concerns directly. This approach helped to foster a sense of connection between the Mayor and his constituents, reminding them that he was one of them and that he cared about their individual needs and challenges.

One of the most important ways for citizens to exercise their power is through voting and selecting leaders who will make decisions that affect their communities. It is essential to prioritize and support local elections to ensure that the voices of all community members are heard and represented.

As a responsible member of the global community, it is crucial to possess the ability to comprehend the challenges that impact us and compellingly communicate one's convictions. It is of utmost importance to acquire the skills necessary to research these issues and understand how to advocate for them. The lessons underscore the significance of fostering a profound emotional connection to a specific topic and honing the ability to articulate one's ideas and concerns effectively. By expressing one's thoughts and opinions, such as on People's Day, we can demonstrate to others that these issues hold great significance and require attention.

**WELCOME TO PEOPLE'S DAY!** This role-playing exercise allows student-citizens to request or express a concern to the Mayor. However, student-citizens should remember that they only have one chance to do so, so make it count! Be specific and clear about their request or concern. After student-citizens make their request, the Mayor will consult with their cabinet to develop a possible solution for the issue. The cabinet's job is to advocate for proposals that involve their interests. After all citizens have advocated for their issues, the Mayor will prioritize their top seven initiatives. To increase the chances of fulfilling student-citizens' requests, consider compromising or combining several requests into one initiative.

The Mayor will select their cabinet, which may include the same folks from their campaign team.

The **Chief of Staff (the teacher)** provides guidance, keeps the class on track and reminds the Mayor when solutions may be out of their scope of power or if they need more time to file permits. Only some things can be a quick fix, and only some solutions will work as the Mayor thinks. The Chief of Staff (classroom teacher) encourages ideas if the Mayor and cabinet are stuck and provides roadblocks if they are pursuing solutions too quickly.

The **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)** manages budgets and ensures that all expenses, including personnel and supplies, are accounted for. They guide fiscally responsible decisions.

The **Deputy Mayor for Education** deals primarily with public schools, the education system and curriculum, public parks and playgrounds and libraries.

The **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services** oversees hospitals, provides counseling services for grief, addiction and mental health and offers assistance to disabled persons, senior citizens, families of all types and those experiencing homelessness.

The **Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development** oversees various areas, including street maintenance, public transportation, traffic flow, food and grocery access, crime reduction, employment and housing opportunities, internet access and public safety concerns.

While the Chief of Staff (Teacher) acquaints the cabinet with their duties (they can also refer to D.C.'s FY24 Budget Overview to remember what specific projects their sector is working on), student-citizens should refresh themselves with their most pressing issues, with notes from Day One.

### **Learning Activities**

#### **People's Day (30 minutes)**

Citizens can ask questions and express their concerns to the Mayor and cabinet. Each person is allowed one minute to present their issue. It's essential to stay within the time limit. After the citizen speaks, the Mayor consults with their cabinet for one minute to discuss possible solutions and the required work. Cabinet members may also debate the importance of the issue. Finally, the Mayor follows up with the citizen for 30 seconds.

#### **Wrap-Up (15 minutes)**

Facilitate a discussion on the political empowerment experienced by both the citizens, the Mayor and the Cabinet. Where did everyone feel limited or less successful? What approaches were more successful? It is no easy feat to hold a position of power, which may explain why finding qualified candidates can be challenging. You may allude to current events involving the office of the President of the United States and discuss the importance of checks and balances, due process, consensus building and compromise.

### **Assessment:**

Educators should use the Exit Tickets referenced in the lessons as assessment or create an assessment tool best suited for their curriculum requirements and student learning needs.

## **Materials and Resources Needed for the Lessons**



- Various song selections are referenced in lessons.
- Speakers to play music and political ads.
- DC FY24 Budget. Print for students without laptops.
- Various research material referenced in lesson.

## **Extension Activity: Discussion Questions**

1. If you could ask the mayor of your city one question, what would it be and why? What does the mayor need to know about young people in your community today?
2. What leadership qualities do you use in your daily life? How does it feel to embody them?
3. Is it necessary to have elected officials? Why or why not?
4. How do you get more involved in your local government without running for office?
5. What is power and who does it belong to?
6. How has the meaning of citizenship evolved? In what ways has the definition of citizenship progressed over time?
7. Which citizen's story did you connect with? Why?
8. Why do you think the playwright chose this style of play to tell the story of Maynard Jackson?
9. How did the citizens' reflection illustrate the life, triumphs and struggles of Maynard Jackson?
10. How did Maynard Jackson ensure that his efforts were sustainable and had lasting impact?