

We the People

Seeing People With Disabilities In Museum Collections

OVERVIEW

Theme Introduction

In this unit, our theme is “We the People.” Who is an American? And who gets to decide? How have our rights and privileges changed in 250 years? Why do certain groups retain more of those rights and privileges than others? We’ll explore these questions and more.

Video

[Seeing People With Disabilities In Museum Collections](#) with Arabeth Balasko, Curator of Photographs, Prints and Media at Cincinnati Museum Center

Guiding Questions

As students watch the video, invite them to consider the following questions:

- Why are the voices of certain groups sometimes missing from museum collections?
- Why is it important that a story be told from the perspective of those who lived? Why is it important for people to see themselves within museum collections?
- What character traits did the individuals discussed in the video have in common?

Key Vocabulary

- **Advocacy:** Public support of a particular cause.



Kay Irion and Connie Boswell on the Bluebird Club show, Cincinnati Museum Center

ACTIVITIES

Community Connections

Recommended for grades 4-8

In the video, we met two disability advocates who made an impact in Cincinnati in the mid-1900s: Alverna Daisy Bennett Babbs Williams and Kay Irion. In this activity, students will research an influential person and learn about diverse ways to advocate.

After watching the video, ask students to discuss how these two women advocated both for themselves and for the disability community.

Possible discussion topics include:

- Being persistent
- Championing accessibility
- Raising visibility and awareness
- Cultivating empathy
- Illustrating capability and humanity

Remind students that group and personal advocacy can inspire change, sometimes over time, even if laws don't change. Discuss how these individuals broke barriers within their communities and raised visibility and awareness of those with disabilities. Ask students: do individuals with disabilities have greater awareness, acceptance, accessibility and opportunity today than they did in the 1940s? What are examples of this change?

Students can further explore progress by researching an individual or organization that advocates for communities with disabilities (see below). Ask students to create a series of slides about their individual or organization.

Students should include:

- A photo or logo of their person or organization
- Information about the group that their subject advocates for
- A bit about their subject's story, such as what life events led to their advocacy
- How their subject advocates for their community: what strategies, events, communication, etc. do they utilize? How do their efforts compare to how Kay Irion and Alverna Babbs advocated for their communities in the mid-1900s? What has changed since then, and why? What has stayed the same, and why?

Combine class slides into a slideshow and invite the authors to present their work to the class.

Potential Individuals and Organizations:

- Abia Akram
- Judy Huemann
- Brad Lomax
- Alice Wong
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- The Arc of the United States
- Buddy Up For Life
- Disability Rights Ohio
- GiGi's Playhouse
- Living Arrangements for Developmental Disabilities (LADD)
- Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council
- University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

Optional Extension: Invite students to connect with an advocacy organization of their choosing by writing a letter or e-mail. Students can share why this organization inspires them and, if desired, ask how they can get involved in their mission.

Advocating for a Cause

Recommended for grades 6-10

In the video, we learned the story of Kay Irion, who worked at a Cincinnati radio station in the 1930s and lost the use of her legs in an automobile accident. Irion used her radio show to feature and share the voices of others with disabilities. In this activity, students will use media to advocate on behalf of a cause or community.

Review how Kay Irion used her position as host of the Bluebird Club radio show to give voice to individuals with disabilities at a time when disabilities were often hidden.

Discuss how she accomplished this, utilizing any of these prompts:

- How was her choice of guest unique for this time period? What biases, stereotypes or prejudice did these individuals face in the 1940s?
- How did The Bluebird Club advocate for disability acceptance?
 - Did the fact that the host was a member of the disability community herself have an impact? In what way?
 - Why was it significant that she interviewed individuals with a variety of disabilities?
- How did Irion's use of her radio platform increase awareness of her cause?
 - Who needed to advocate for Kay Irion so she could advocate for others?
- In advocacy, why is it important to hear stories from the perspectives of those who live them?

Kay Irion championed accessibility and inclusivity for disabled people by sharing their stories with her audience. Like Kay Irion, students can practice using media to advocate for a contemporary issue or group. Divide students into groups and ask each group to choose an issue or group that interests them. Then, invite students to choose a platform for their advocacy, such as a podcast, social media post, newspaper article or magazine cover. Then, ask students to draft a podcast script, social media post or article, magazine cover, etc.

Invite each group to present their content to the class, answering the following questions:

- Why did your group choose this issue?
- Who is the intended audience of your content? Who would this message reach? Who wouldn't it reach?
- What change do you want this message to inspire, and what techniques did you use to inspire that change?
- Whose voices or stories did you include in your piece?



Kay Irion and Ira Gossett Hawk on the Bluebird Club, Cincinnati Museum Center.

STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

- **OH Government 3.10:** Individuals make the community a better place by taking action to solve problems in a way that promotes the common good.
- **OH Government 7.16:** Analyzing individual and group perspectives is essential to understanding historic and contemporary issues.
- **OH Geography 8.18:** Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.
- **OH Government 8.20:** Active participation in social and civic groups can lead to the attainment of individual and public goals.
- **OH Contemporary World Issues HS.2:** Advances in communications technology have profound effects on the ability of governments, interest groups, individuals and the media to share information across national and cultural borders.
- **OH Contemporary World Issues HS.14:** The development and use of technology influences economic, political, ethical and social issues.
- **KY 5.I.CC.3:** Explain different approaches people can take to address local, regional and global problems, using examples from U.S. history.
- **KY HS.C.CV.2:** Assess how the expansion of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights and human rights influence the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups.
- **KY HS.C.CV.3:** Analyze the impact of the efforts of individuals and reform movements on the expansion of civil rights and liberties locally, nationally and internationally.
- **KY HS.UH.CE.5:** Evaluate the ways in which groups facing discrimination worked to achieve expansion of rights and liberties from 1877-present.