

The Democracy Project

What is it?

How will participating benefit our teens and community?

Presented by Humanities Montana and the Montana State Library

THE DEMOCRACY
Humanities
MONTANA **PROJECT**

Generously funded by
the Charles Engelhard Foundation

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Welcome

What is the Democracy Project?

Piloted in three libraries: 2021-22 school year

Participating for the 2022-23 school year

Timeline and expectations

Benefits to libraries and teens

How can HM and DP help build teen audiences?

Invite questions

Closing/How to express interest

Land Acknowledgement

Humanities Montana acknowledges that we are in the homelands of Indigenous people. We offer our respect for their history and culture, and for the path they have always shown us in caring for this place for generations to come.

When do you feel free?

What is something you want to change?

What is something you want to preserve?

What is The Democracy Project?

The Democracy Project engages teens in civic action through partnerships with local libraries, community organizers, and Humanities Montana.

This program gives teens the resources to effect change and know their role in an evolving democracy through direct participation. Students work for six months on projects they feel are vital to their community, ending with a public showcase.

They start by brainstorming questions like, “**What makes you angry? What do you love that you want to protect or grow? What would you do with the power and resources to make change?**” and then they work together, with the support of the librarian and Humanities Montana to figure out solutions.

Origin and Pilot Program

Inspired by The Democracy Project (TDP) at the Los Angeles Public Library

Libraries are already where we develop our skills for civic engagement. They are the most responsive form of government and the gateway for understanding and accessing other government services. In their essence, libraries exist as an intellectual safe place and have always served to nurture an enlightened electorate.

The ultimate goal for TDP is that the young people who participate will gain two essential skills:

- **the critical-thinking abilities necessary to evaluate the political events of the day**
- **the knowledge of how to access primary sources rather than relying on shallow news bytes**

Their understanding of American political history and the workings of our local, state, and federal government will allow them to fully participate as informed voters, members of our communities, and leaders of our society.

This year the Democracy Project is being piloted in three libraries: Billings, Missoula, and Whitehall. Since the projects are teen-led they are each very different and specific to each location and group. We have funding in place for next year and are seeking interested libraries to participate. The program is generously funded by the Charles Engelhard Foundation.

LEARNING DISABILITIES PROJECT - CHATSWORTH BRANCH

FOOD WASTE PROJECT - CHINATOWN BRANCH

FOOD INSECURITY PROJECT - LAKEVIEW TERRACE BRANCH

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM PROJECT - PALISADES BRANCH

NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT - PIO-PICO KOREATOWN BRANCH

FINANCIAL LITERACY PROJECT - PICO UNION BRANCH AND ANGELES MESA BRANCH

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE PROJECT - ROBERTSON BRANCH

HOUSING CRISIS PROJECT - SILVER LAKE BRANCH AND ECHO PARK BRANCH

Billings: taking action

Librarian: Vanessa Justice



The students involved in the Billings chapter of the Democracy Project are focusing on the issue of food insecurity in our city.

These teens have partnered with local nonprofit Eat Share Give to work on addressing the issue of hunger in Billings. Eat Share Give has already set up two community fridges located at Kirk's Grocery and Rocky Mountain College which contain free, nutritious, ready-made meals that are accessible to all.

Now, Eat Share Give is working with the Democracy Project to set up a third fridge at Tumbleweed's Youth Resource Drop-In Center. Tumbleweed is a community-based agency that provides services to runaway, homeless, and vulnerable youth and their families.



"The Democracy Project has encouraged me to think more broadly about the myriad of issues facing my community and what steps I can take to address them. Working with other teens to help alleviate food insecurity in Billings has been a very meaningful experience, and I look forward to continued collaboration with community partners to ensure access to healthy and nutritious food in our local area."

- Hank Jagodzinski

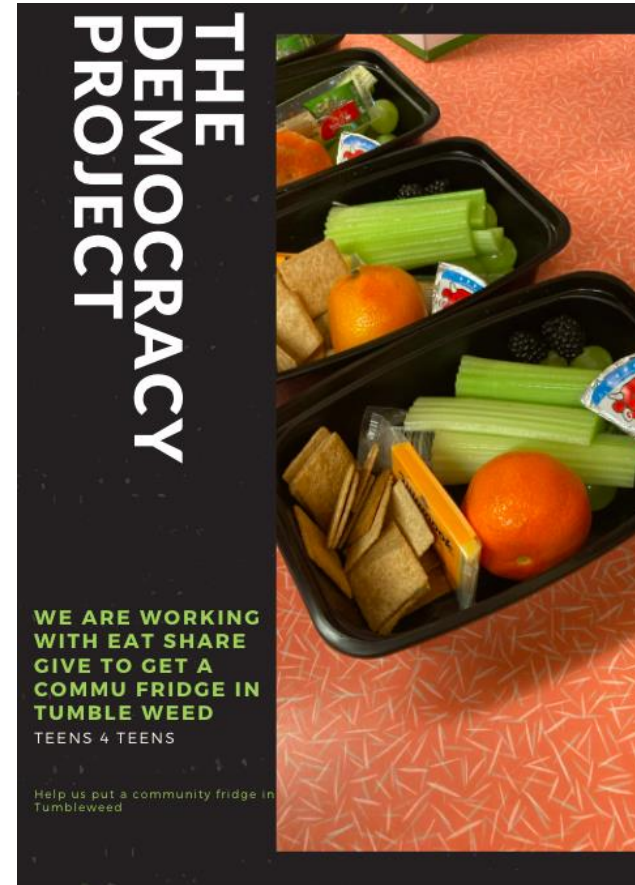
eat.share.give

eat with us. share with your neighbors. give to your community



Stocking the community fridge at
Kirk's Grocery

“The democracy project has inspired me to spark civic change on issues that matter most to me. This year, our project is focused on reducing food insecurity. The democracy project has helped me to start to realize that no matter your age or qualifications, anyone can make a positive, direct impact on their community.” - Jack Milroy



Teen created flyer

Whitehall: culminating event

Librarian: Jeannie Ferriss



Last Thursday, April 28, at 7 PM, the Library hosted the **Rescuers/Survivors Fair** with our teenagers representing a real-life survivor or rescuer from the Holocaust.

Each patron who came to see this amazing enactment of courage, survival, heartbreak, and selflessness received a passport to the past as they visited different centers. **Each teen shared the life of a person who either survived the Holocaust from 1933 to 1945 or helped to save others, often at the cost of their own lives.** It was a memorable evening and the public was invited to participate on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.



The Whitehall Community Library
Holocaust Book Club



As attendees stopped at each table to meet the survivor/rescuer they got a sticker for their passport, showing they visited," Ferriss said. "They'll learn about the person the teen is representing by asking questions. Inside the passport there are suggested questions to help attendees get ideas of what to ask the teens, for example, what was your experience in the Holocaust, where are you from, what is a rescuer?"



The evening of the Fair began at a registration table manned by Cindy Busarow, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors.





Katie Frankman, 17, a high school senior, represented a young lady named Zivia Lubetkin, who was born in Poland and was in her mid-twenties when the Holocaust began.

"I chose Zivia Lubetkin because I really admire her bravery and selflessness; she was an amazing woman, both a survivor and a rescuer," Frankman said. "Instead of remaining in the safe Soviet-controlled areas, Zivia risked her life to come back to Warsaw to help her fellow Jews there and be part of the resistance inside the ghetto."



Excerpted from coverage By
[MARTA VARELA](#), Whitehall Ledger

Missoula: climate stories

Librarian: Linette Greene



Our focus is on climate change, specifically air quality. We put together a survey for their peers about climate change issues and have coordinated with one English teacher who is allowing Democracy Project members to present a journal prompt, lead a discussion, then circulate the survey. Survey takers are invited to share their own climate story to be included on the Montanans for a Livable Climate website and/or quarterly publication. Another goal is to participate creating a panel for the travelling exhibit that Montanans for a Livable Climate is planning for the fall.

Additionally, the group was granted permission from the Missoula Public Library board to display EPA air quality flags on the second floor kids' balcony, along with educational material about air quality. The board also gave tentative permission for MPL to participate in the EPA air quality sensor lending program. SpectrUM (children's science museum housed in the library) has indicated interest in participating in the lending program as well as augmenting the educational side of the flag program.

“The Democracy project provides a place for students to discuss interesting and relevant topics while also having the opportunity to talk to experts in the community about those topics. The pizza ain't bad either.” (Arthur)

“I enjoyed meeting with other people who care about important issues in our community like climate change and criminal justice reform, and want to make a positive impact.” (Amy)





Left to right Arthur, Jesse, Lucy, Amy

“Democracy Project has been a great place to feel like you are making a difference and making the change you want to see.” (Jesse)



“It’s been really cool to discuss the world’s current issues and see everyone’s views and opinions. The pizza was dope.” (Lucy)

Participation for 2022-23: Benefits to libraries and teens

- Opportunities for taking initiative and experiencing agency
- Teens see the library as a safe space and a place to access information and ideas
- Once teens are there, they might stay and participate in other ways
- Financial support increases the impact -teens can even leverage into matching donations
- Educates teens on the systems they will need to navigate as adults to participate in democracy
- Parents may become impacted or involved as well
- Teens are responsible for idea generation with librarian support
- Experiences collaborating with outside partners and each other to create tangible outcomes
- Hands-on experience working with local government, business, and nonprofit leaders, and other people affected by the issue your group chooses to tackle

Participation for 2022-23: Timeline and expectations

Spring/Summer

- Informational webinar
- **June 1 deadline to submit letter of interest form**
- **July 1 - libraries notified**
- Conference presentations
- Identify community partners and stakeholders

Sept: teens are recruited and begin meeting at a regular time

- Survey of interests and capacity - recruit teens who have time
- Kick off with an inspirational speaker who will frame ideas of democracy
- Find ways to empower the teens - committees and weekly action items
- Snacks!

Oct: teens brainstorm ideas/librarians invite guest speakers

- Follow their interests/help them dig deeper
 - What matters to their own lives?
 - What do they observe around them that they want to change or preserve?

- Provide a grounding in civics/democracy/state and local systems/constitution
 - State and federal constitutions
 - City Council
 - Indian Education for All
 - How to vet information sources and fact check assertions
 - How to tell the difference between fact and opinion

Nov: continue explorations

- Check for feasibility
 - We want the teens to feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of the project
 - We want it to be a project they WANT to do and feel comfort in doing (but stretch a little)
- Have teens look beyond their own experience
 - Various needs assessments are done by groups like Enactus
 - Check with other stakeholders - is a project already in place? Don't re-invent the wheel. Often we can help others who are already doing the work
- Check for individual strengths they can bring to the project (ex: video skills, public speaking, budgeting)
 - Have the teens do all that they can - make calls, write emails, research
 - Guide them to introduce themselves as representatives of the DP

Dec: Continue explorations but begin focusing

Jan: Project is decided upon and librarians feel it is feasible within the time frame

- Teens should all be able to articulate the project, both DP and their own project

Feb: Focused work begins

- Plan backwards from culminating deadline/set milestones
- Working groups, assignments

March: Continue focused work

April: Continue focused work

May: Wrap up work and plan sharing

June: Culminating event before the end of the school year, debrief

How can HM and DP help build teen audiences?

- Partnerships or collaboration with teachers/school librarians/counselors
- Reaching out to student government
- Humanities Montana's Speakers in the Schools Roster is available (free) for a wide range of speakers who might visit classes to build interest in students on a range of topics.
- Members of our team at Humanities Montana are happy to make school visits or zooms with the appropriate teachers: social studies civics, or student government groups, to talk more about the Democracy Project.
- Creating an interest survey to distribute virtually - teens might be attracted in order to create change around a specific issue that is important to them.
- Reaching out to existing, motivated teen groups like 4-H or student council, for example
- Reaching out to students, possibly via homeroom teachers, clubs, or advisories, who might not be involved in other activities and are looking for ways to connect and belong.
- Involve satellite sites/branch libraries

Questions?

- What's different about this than, say, other Community Service projects the kids are involved in through local organizations?
- What are the incentives for kids? That is, what's the pitch to get kids actually involved/engaged?
- Is there a list of ideas out there already that could be a springboard for more brainstorming?
- If there are only a couple of kids committed, do we still move forward?
- How exactly does funding for this project work?
- Is it possible to divide the \$5000 among branches?
- Distance is a big issue for our kids - would funds cover transportation?
- Is it possible for a classroom to do this as a class project in coordination with the library?

Thank you for your interest in the Democracy Project!

- DP teens will be presenting at the **Tri-conference in Missoula Aug 5**
- Next steps - **complete google form** to express interest. Copy link from chat.
Link will also arrive along with recording in follow up email.
- Email Jenny with any questions: jennifer.bevill@humanitiesmontana.org
- Check out