

DISABLED RIGHTS



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Lesson Summary

This lesson focuses on the successful Deaf President Now campaign- a movement which took place on the campus of Gallaudet University, Washington DC, in 1988, and was led by students. The protestors shut down the university for over a week, demanding that the administration, which for over a hundred years had been run by hearing people, have a deaf president and majority-deaf board of trustees. Students will be asked to consider the reasons behind the protests, and the ways in which disabled young people can gain representation within institutions.

Learning Objectives

- To learn about the Deaf President Now campaign.
- To think about why groups who are often denied power in society would want to be represented in the leadership of groups and organisations they are a part of.
- To learn about and develop empathy with some of the problems facing disabled people, and to consider how non-disabled people can offer support.

United Nations Sustainable Development Links

- Reduced inequality
- Peace, Justice, and strong institutions

British Council Core Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Creativity and Imagination
- Student Leadership
- Citizenship

Curriculum Links

- PSHE, KS 3-4



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Activity one: Representation and Leadership

Requires: White/Black/Smart Board

Preparation: Write the two statements on either side of the board, ensure that there is space for students to move about the room.

- Explain to students that today they'll be looking at a campaign called 'Deaf President Now', which sought to get a deaf head teacher in place at a deaf college in the USA.
- On the far left of the board, write the statement "A person should be a head teacher because of their skills and work experience." On the far right, write "A person should be a head teacher because they understand their pupils' experiences and backgrounds."
- Ask students to stand up and go to the side of the room which has the statement they most agree with. If they strongly agree ask them to go the very edge of the room. If they think both are equally important ask them to stand in the middle.
- Once students have arranged themselves in line with the statement they agree with, ask them to explain why they agree with the statement they have picked, encouraging students to respond to one another.

Activity two: Outline of Events

Requires: Slides 2-7

Preparation: Ensure that the video on slide 6 can be played

- Run through the slides outlining the course of events of the Deaf President Now protests, using the notes below (slides 2-5).
- Show your students the video on slide 6.
- Ask them to discuss the questions on slide 7 in small groups, before coming back to share their answers with the group



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Activity two cont.

Slide Notes

Slide 2

- Gallaudet University, Washington D.C. was founded in 1864 as a university for deaf students from all across America. It was one of the only schools for deaf people that allowed its students to use sign language. Many deaf schools forbade it, as they felt that deaf people should try to communicate like hearing people.
- For the first 124 years of its existence, it was run by 'hearing' (non-deaf) presidents, which for many deaf people was a problem. They found that hearing people with authority over them tended not to understand their problems, and they felt that the university not being run by deaf people was a symbol of the prejudice they faced. It seemed to say deaf people couldn't do what hearing people could.

Slide 3

- In 1988, there was a chance for a change. There were 3 candidates for the vacant president position, two of whom were deaf, and one of whom was not. The Board of Trustees decided to choose Elisabeth A. Zinser, the hearing candidate, who could not even understand sign language.
- Students and staff immediately walked out of school, annoyed both with the board's decision, and its justification that the country would not approve of a deaf president for the university. This protest would continue for over a week.

Slide 4

- To shut down the campus, students used heavy bike locks to close up the gates, and even drove a bus in front of the main entrance, letting down its tires so it could not be moved. They refused to stop blocking the campus until their four demands were met:
- Zinser's resignation and the selection of a deaf person as president;
- The immediate resignation of Jane Bassett Spilman, chair of the Board of Trustees (who, it was alleged, announced the board's choice with the comment that "the deaf are not yet ready to function in the hearing world");
- The reconstitution of the Board of Trustees with a 51% majority of deaf members (at the time, it was composed of 17 hearing members and 4 Deaf members);
- there would be no reprisals against any students or staff members involved in the protest.



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Activity two cont.

Slide Notes

Slide 5

- Students continued their protests, despite it being spring break at the time. Protestors continued to blockade the campus, and their numbers grew as they were joined by deaf students at other schools, former students of the university, as well as supporters from the hearing community.
- Protests were not just on campus. Twice they marched to the US capitol building, where the government is based. They also went on television and did interviews with the press, and encouraged supporters to call politicians.
- The protest ended on 13th March 1988, when all four demands were met, and Irving King Jordan, a deaf person, was selected as the new President.

Activity Three: Protestors' understanding of the issues at stake

Requires: Slide 8, worksheet sources 1-4.

Preparation. Ensure that there are enough print outs of sources 1 and 2 for half of the students in your group, and enough copies of source 3 and 4 for the other half of the group.

- Put the image from slide 8 on the board, and split the group in two. Have half the students read the extracts from the flyers (sources 1 and 2) and the others to read the extracts from the interviews (sources 3 and 4). Ask them to highlight anything they find interesting
- Ask students why they might use the phrase "we still have a dream?" on their banner- what might that be a reference to? Try to draw out the connection to Dr Martin Luther King and the fact that the protestors were consciously connecting what they did with the legacy of the civil rights movement.
- Ask students whether they think DPN was similar to the civil rights movement and whether protestors were right to make the comparison?
- Ask the students why they think deaf students felt it was important to have a deaf president. There are several themes in the sources that can be discussed- the practicalities of communication, the impact of deaf educators, the fact that a deaf president could be a symbol for deaf people's ability to succeed, the sense of being allowed to run their own lives as a community.



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Activity Four: Art and Protest

Requires: Slide 9, art materials, paper, access to computers

Preparation: Ensure that students have art materials, and that there are enough computers so that students can look at materials online about the campaign. Load the listed webpage on the computers.

- Show students the pictures that deaf artist Nancy Rourke created, inspired by the Deaf President Now campaign, on slide 9.
- Encourage students to create a piece of artwork that is inspired by the same campaign—allow them to research images of the demonstrations and protests online, or let them read accounts of events such as those at:

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/about/history-and-traditions/deaf-president-now/the-issues/the-week-of-dpn>



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Source 1

Promotional Flyer for the March 1, 1988 Rally, distributed around campus in late-February.

It's time!

In 1842, a Roman Catholic became president of the University of Notre Dame.

In 1875, a woman became president of Wellesley College.

In 1875, a Jew became president of Yeshiva University.

In 1926, a Black person became president of Howard University.

AND in 1988, the Gallaudet University presidency belongs to a DEAF person.

To show OUR solidarity behind OUR mandate for a deaf president of OUR university, you are invited to participate in a historical RALLY!



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Source 2

Flyer distributed at the March 1st, 1988 rally

DEAF PRESIDENT NOW DEAF PRESIDENT NOW DEAF PRESIDENT NOW WHAT IS THE RALLY ALL ABOUT?

The purpose of the rally is to indicate support for choosing a deaf president of Gallaudet University for the first time in the 124-year history of the university.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RALLY?

The Deaf President Now Committee (DPN) which consists of Gallaudet students, alumni, faculty and staff members.

WHY A DEAF PRESIDENT?

It is time for Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts university for the deaf in the WORLD, to become sensitive to the needs of deaf people of Gallaudet and of the United States. Here are a few examples of the lack of sensitivity shown towards the needs of the deaf by Gallaudet University.

1. Only 22% of Gallaudet employees are deaf. only 18% of the employees in administrative positions are deaf.
2. The Gallaudet Board of Trustees has twenty-one (21) members of only which four (4) are deaf.
3. There are faculty members who can't sign very well but meet the minimal requirements needed to teach at the university. Some of those teachers have been teaching at the university for many years. Needless to say, this deprives students of a good education.
4. Senators Bob Dole and Bob Graham, among many other legislators have a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) in their office and yet, Senator Dan Inouye, member of the Gallaudet Board of Trustees has no such machine in his office.

We do not accuse the people responsible for the conditions mentioned above of callousness. It is merely a lack of awareness on their part. With a deaf person in the position of leadership, one that has the same views, experiences, and needs that we do, people will become more informed of the needs of deaf people...

HOW CAN I HELP GET A DEAF PRESIDENT OF GALLAUDET?

You are helping by showing your support at this rally. You can also contribute further by giving just five minutes of your time to call your congressperson and senators...

WHAT WILL THE DPN DO IF A HEARING PERSON IS SELECTED?

The DPN's work is just beginning. Regardless of the outcome, our next goal is to get a majority of deaf people on the Gallaudet Board of Trustees. The Commission on Education of the Deaf has recommended this and we wholeheartedly support this.

These flyers are reproduced from the Gallaudet University website
<https://www.gallaudet.edu/about/history-and-traditions/rally-flyers>

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Source 3

Fred Weiner helped to organise the Deaf President Now protests. Here are extracts from two interviews with him where he talks about why they happened and what their impact was.

Weiner wants me to understand that he and his friends had mostly watched their parents struggle to find white-collar work. He tells me that his father was the only Deaf child in his family and so became a printer, “whereas my father's relatives became doctors and lawyers.” [His friends] were mostly in the same situation: recent graduates, just starting their careers, wondering how to overcome professional barriers. Another of [his friends], for example, had a father who was a florist. “A lot of us saw our [Deaf] parents doing blue-collar work, knowing they could do more.” The campaign to seat the first Deaf president in university history became, for Weiner and others, not just about leadership at Gallaudet, but claiming a leadership position for all Deaf people.

(How 'Deaf President Now' Changed America- David M Perry)

<https://psmag.com/education/how-deaf-president-now-changed-america>

“What the protest was really about was self-determination, and that deaf people could make decisions about our lives and about our own affairs. So, we’re more engaged in our university and the decisions that are made and how that impacts us as individuals, but also as a community.

I think the symbolism of having a deaf president and what that represents really changed the mindset for deaf people everywhere. It gave us more self-confidence and allowed us to become more successful in our personal and professional affairs.”

(30 Years After Gallaudet Students Demanded A Deaf President, It's A 'Typical University' - Kathy Goldgeier, Matt McCleskey)

<https://wamu.org/story/18/03/12/30-years-gallaudet-students-demanded-deaf-president-typical-university/#.XLb90DBKjIU>



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Source 4

The following quotes come from a series of interviews with deaf adults about their own experiences with both deaf and hearing teachers when they were at school.

Sheri said:

"I noticed that Deaf teachers know Deaf students' tendencies. Anticipated their needs. [Better] management of their teaching, changed their way of teaching to match with their levels. They have the expertise, they can do that. While hearing teachers overlook the students. They don't know their tendencies. The hearing teachers tend to have stereotypes with Deaf students. The word 'deaf' means they are all the same way. That's my point of view when I was student. I preferred to have Deaf teachers because of easier communication with the students. They can sign with them."...

Bruce's experience is illustrative:

"My worst teacher was... in botany class. The teacher I think was his 1st or 2nd year at that school. [They] wrote on the board and talked at the same time. I said 'You know that sometimes I can't understand if turn your back and I can't read lips.' He kept on forgetting that. He stood in back of the classroom and talked about trees. Everyone has papers and listened and wrote down information. They can hear what teacher said. I can't look back because teacher wanted me to focus on my paper. So, I copied from other students. He caught me and thought I was cheating. 'I couldn't hear so what do you want me to do?' We argued and he sent me to the principal's office and he said 'Well you're cheating' and I said 'I can't hear behind me.'"

David H. Smith (2013) Deaf adults: retrospective narratives of school experiences and teacher expectations, *Disability & Society*, 28:5, 674-686,



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