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Lesson Summary

In this session, students will learn about the tactics and aims of the Occupy Movement, and will study the youth-led protests in Hong Kong which aimed to win democratic rights, drawing on the tactics of the Occupy movement. They will look at what caused the movement, who was involved, and the tactics that were used. The group will then examine the different ways that protestors have occupied space in different historic and contemporary situations.

Learning Objectives

- To introduce students to the symbols, aims, tactics, and impact of the Occupy movement.
- To discuss the value of non-violent protest and its tactics.
- To think about the strength of images, and what gives them the power to affect people, circulate and go viral.
- To consider what ideas can ensure democratic and equitable societies.

United Nations Sustainable Development Links

- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Reduced Inequality
- Peace, Justice, and strong institutions

British Council Core Skills

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

Curriculum Links

- Citizenship KS2-4



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Activity One: Introduction

Requires: Slide 2

Preparation: Ensure that the video on slide 2 can be played

Occupy Wall Street began life in September 2011. Inspired by the Arab Spring, and particularly the Egyptian protestors' occupation of Tahrir Square, activists involved in the anti-consumerist magazine Adbusters called for an occupation of Wall Street, the central financial district of New York. Local groups which had protested house foreclosures and budget cuts, trade union activists, online activist collective Anonymous, and anarchists all backed the decision, which led to a two-month protest encampment in Zuccoti Park.

Decisions at the protest camp were made through consensus-based assemblies. Participants spoke out against wealth inequality, austerity and budget cuts, and the influence of corporations in politics.

The protest sparked similar Occupy protests across the world, which used similar tactics (protest camps), methods of organising (participatory democracy) and had similar goals (an end to wealth inequality).

- Show the students the video from slide two, outlining the history of Occupy Wall Street.
- Ask the students what they know about the Occupy movement. What do they think the protestors who made up the movement wanted? What tactics did the protestors use? Do they think that the protestors were successful? What influence do they think it had on other people in the USA and around the world?

Activity Two: Occupy Central

Requires: Slides 3-6

Preparation: Read through the explanatory notes below

Explain to students that the ideas and actions of Occupy Wall Street spread to other countries and that in 2014, Occupy Central was a protest that broke it in Hong Kong. Run through slides 3-6 and use the information below to introduce students to case study of Occupy Central. While the Hong Kong Occupy movement used similar tactics and methods of organising, its aims were centred on universal suffrage rather than wealth inequality.



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Activity two cont.

Slide 3

- On July 1, 1997, after 150 years of British rule, Hong Kong, a small area in the South East of Mainland China, was returned to Chinese control. The Chinese government, based in Beijing, promised that they would give Hong Kong democratic rights and freedoms. They said that elections for the next leader of Hong Kong, known as the Chief Executive, would be held in 2017.

Slide 4

- However, in August 2014, the Chinese government announced that candidates for these elections had to first get approval from a 'nominating panel' which was effectively controlled by them. They made it clear that they would not allow particular candidates or ideas to be allowed in the elections. Activists in Hong Kong felt this was a betrayal of what was promised, and launched a campaign for free elections open to everyone.

Slide 5

- A group called 'Occupy Central with Love and Peace' (sometimes called 'OC') announced that it would begin a campaign of civil disobedience in October 2014. Meanwhile a campaign group of school students called 'Scholarism', along with the 'Hong Kong Federation of Students', which represents university students, began a boycott of schools and universities from mid-September. They held rallies in front of government buildings over several days, which were eventually attacked by the police with tear gas. The protestors were mainly very young, with leaders like Joshua Wong being only 17 at the time. Many people in Hong Kong felt that using violence against young peaceful protestors was wrong.

Slide 6

- The police attack spurred Occupy Central with Love and Peace to begin their campaign early, and tent cities were set up across major roads and public squares in Hong Kong, with over 100,000 people taking part at its peak. Students had initially shielded themselves from the police's tear gas with umbrellas, leading to umbrellas being used as a symbol for the non-violent protest movement. The movement stopped traffic for over 77 days, bringing parts of Hong Kong to a standstill, before eventually being cleared out by the police in December, 2014.
- While the campaign was unsuccessful, the movement is not over. Several of the young leaders of Scholarism set up a new pro-democracy political party in 2016. They were arrested and put in prison briefly in 2017, which means that they cannot run in elections until 2022.



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Activity three: Reading Sources

Requires: *Worksheet Source 1-3, white/black/smart board*

Preparation: *Write up the first set of questions on the board*

These questions and sources aim to address what the role of police violence was in helping to bring more people to the movement were. It offers a chance for students to reflect on whether civil disobedience is justified for a greater goal, and what factors might make a cause become more popular.

- **Ask Students** to read through sources 1 and 2. While they read, write the following questions on the board:
 - Why did Rick Chan and Timmie Yu get involved in these protests?
 - If the protestors were blocking roads, businesses, and government buildings, was it right of the government to try to get them to leave?
 - Do you think using non-violent resistance (like the use of umbrellas) in response to police attacks was the right approach? Why/Why not?
- **Ask students** to split into small groups of 3-4 and discuss these questions, and ask each group to pick someone to report back to the wider group.
- **Ask students** to take it in turns reading a paragraph aloud from Source 3, until all the extracts have been read out.
- **Ask the group** the following questions, one at a time, allowing the chance for students to answer and to respond to one another. These questions aim to draw out the idea that civil disobedience can be healthy in a society and allow people to organise for better treatment. They also offer the opportunity to think about the practical impact of occupations of public space, and why this tactic could be valuable (for example, having an economic impact on the operations of businesses, increasing pressure on the government to negotiate).
 - Why do you think Occupy Central tries to talk with the government before using civil disobedience? Do you think they are right to do this?
 - Why does Occupy Central want to train people in non-violent tactics?
 - Why might shutting down parts of Hong Kong make the Chinese government less likely to send in the army or police?
 - Is it a smart move to announce your plans to protest to the government beforehand? Why?



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Activity Four: Umbrellas

Requires: Slide 7

No preparation required in advance.

- Show the students the images of umbrellas on slide 7, and inform them that the 2014 Hong Kong protests became known as the umbrella revolution after many protestors chose to use it as a symbol of their movement. Ask the group the following questions:
- Why do you think the umbrella image became so popular?
- What does an image of an umbrella represent here?
- Can you think of other protest symbols and images which have become famous? Why do you think they have this power?

Activity Five: The Lennon Wall

Requires: Slides 8-11, post it notes of different colours, pens, a clear space such as a wall, empty board, or window.

Preparation: Divide post-it notes into small piles, ensure that there are enough pens for students to write and draw in a variety of colours, and that there is a clear space on which the post-it notes can be stuck.

- Show students the images of the 'Lennon Wall' (slides 8-end)- a series of post-it notes used by Occupy Central protestors in Hong Kong to create a mosaic. Explain that these were used as a way of drawing attention to the causes and ideas that the protestors thought were important, and demonstrating that they did not intend to damage public property.
- Set up a board or a wall which can be used to create your own 'Lennon Wall'. Give the students a variety of different coloured post it notes and pens, and ask them to fill them with messages that they think are important. They can be about things which affect them in their daily lives, or things which they've seen affect people that they care about, or causes that have inspired them. They can use lyrics, poems, drawings, slogans, phrases, or even single words to express the ideas that they think are important to change the world for the better.

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Source 1

Quote from a student taking part in the protests, from The Guardian

Timmie Yu, 20, student

I was in the class boycott [last week] and came here on Monday mainly because I couldn't stand police being harsh to the crowd. Although I'm not very sure whether these protests will succeed, I want to support them. We are all united. On Monday, it was crowded from Wanchai to Central. I'm surprised by how many people there are – but it should be like this. I think for the first few days people might not have understood, but after students have expressed what they think, I think parents understand why the students came down here. And you do see adults who have come to support it.

(Tania Branigan, The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/30/-sp-hong-kong-umbrella-protest-demonstrators-voices>)

Source 2

Extracts from an article about the violence protestors faced

To ward off tear gas, demonstrators used homemade defenses such as plastic wrap, which they used to cover their face and arms, as well as goggles and surgical masks.

But umbrellas, used to deflect pepper spray, have become the movement's most visible symbol. They were the main line of defense Sunday for a huge crowd demonstrators trying to push past barricades manned by police dousing the crowd with pepper spray from backpack sprayers.

As the crowd surged forward, officers tore umbrellas away one by one and threw them aside.

Demonstrator Rick Chan summed up the feelings of many on Monday when he shouted to police watching the encampment, "We're only carrying umbrellas!"

"I came last night and saw police fire many rounds of tear gas at the crowd, who were mostly young students and even included some old people," said Chan, a 32-year-old finance worker. "I feel it was extremely unnecessary. They could see protesters were not dangerous. Instead they made everyone very angry. I plan to stay here indefinitely."

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/29/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/hong-kong-activists-launch-mass-campaign-democracy/#.XLeNZTBKiU>



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Source 3

Extracts from an article on the aims and tactics of Occupy Central

The plan to occupy is the last resort in the OC Hong Kong strategy. They're first seeking a dialogue with the government in an effort to reach a settlement before a call to direct action...

OC's aims are not solely short-term or suffrage-based. A large component of OC is to educate Hong Kong residents on the benefits of nonviolent resistance and prepare them to use civil disobedience as a means to place limits on the power of leaders they see as illegitimate, empowering Hong Kong to deal not only with this threat but with future threats as well. The movement's commitment to nonviolent resistance was visible on New Year's Day, when thousands of Hong Kong citizens marched for political reform. Participants used the march as an occasion to learn and practice nonviolent action techniques, forming human chains and protecting themselves from possible police violence...

OC, like many movements before it, is attempting to produce a defence capacity that is strong enough and organized enough to convince a potential attacker — in this case, China — not to aggress because the consequences of an aggressive action could be unacceptably costly and ultimately unsuccessful.

By announcing in advance its plans to non-violently disrupt economic activity in central Hong Kong, OC is keen to increase the cost of Beijing's potential decision to not grant Hong Kong universal suffrage. The nonviolent strategy here is to make life very difficult for Hong Kong — and, consequently, China — if Beijing does not honour its promise.

(Michael Shank, Huffpost https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-hong-kongs-occupycent_b_5906184)



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