

Proposal

Narratives of Environmental Activism

For this project, I propose to research environmental activism in Washington's museums and with activists and lawmakers to build out a student research- and narrative-writing project centered on environmental activism throughout United States history.

My proposal for the 2025 Cooke Fellowship is centered around environmental activism as a modern example of social change movements throughout United States history. In my Humanities course at Codman Academy, students learn United States history through the lens of social movements, and it is my hope that the Cooke Fellowship can help me access world class museums and partners in Washington D.C. with which I can develop a curriculum unit about environmental activism. I propose to spend one week in D.C. this summer researching and preparing this curriculum unit.

Throughout United States history, activists have fought for social change. Famously, colonists agitated for independence from Great Britain and King George III's rule. Abolitionists advocated for the end of slavery. Suffragettes worked towards voting rights changes. Indigenous groups continue to petition for the return of native lands. In the ongoing struggle to create "a more perfect union," social activists debate about how to move forward. Which tactics and strategies will be most effective? Which will be most easily executed? Which will be moral? When students dig into these questions, they gain a deep understanding of the complexities of the world, and I hope that they build optimism for what's possible. Climate change is an existential crisis, one that impacts students directly, and I want students to be able to understand how the United States' industrialization and expansion has contributed to the crisis but most importantly how environmental activists have worked to tackle the problem.

One of the most effective ways to build empathy is through storytelling. As part of my curriculum unit, students would write researched narratives about real life environmental activists. The unit would culminate in a community presentation of student's research and narrative, helping the wider community learn about and connect with the modern environmentalist movement.

To create this curriculum, I propose to visit Washington D.C. this summer to study environmentalism. I would take advantage of the Smithsonian Institution's museum exhibits, including:

- The Smithsonian Gardens’ “Native American Landscape” exhibit, which uses traditional Native American practices to “maintain a sustainable garden”;
- The National Museum of Natural History’s “Our Places: Connecting People and Nature” exhibit, which “offers visitors a chance to meet dedicated scientists and community members working to protect dynamic environments around the globe,” and “NASA’s Earth Information Center” exhibit, where visitors can learn about how NASA collects data to help “scientists, policy makers, and communities around the world understand and respond to climate change”;
- The National Zoo’s “American Trail” and “Our Voices in Saving Species” exhibits, which both promote conservation efforts;
- The National Museum of the American Indian’s exhibit titled “Nation to Nation: Treaties between the United States and American Indian Nations,” which explores the United States westward expansion in the 19th century, a history necessary to understanding the United States’ role in climate change throughout history;
- The National Museum of American History’s “Power Machinery” exhibit, which explores the Industrial Revolution; the exhibit titled “Food: Transforming the American Table,” which explores the industrialization of food production and the local and organic food movements; and the “Giving in America” exhibit that explores philanthropy and activism (Smithsonian).

Because this project would frame environmentalism through the lens of individual social activists, it will be fruitful to explore the Smithsonian Institute’s many exhibits that highlight activists involved in other social movements. This includes a number of exhibits in the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of American History.

I would also tour the Capitol to collect research and materials to support my teaching of the lawmaking process. I would schedule interviews with conservationists at the Smithsonian Institute, youth activist in local non-profits such as the Sunrise Movement, and potentially lawmakers themselves. Throughout my time in D.C., I would gather research and school materials to develop my Humanities curriculum unit. I would also document my research week, “microblogging” for Codman Academy’s social media.

In my past work with the Massachusetts Historical Society, I have learned how valuable it is as an educator to see and touch and experience history first-hand. I was able to develop high-quality curricular materials about the Boston abolition movement using the actual letters, journals, and accounting books of those who lived that experience. D.C. has museums and experts that would be immeasurably valuable in helping me develop curriculum for Codman Academy and for exploring environmental activism with our students. I believe this is the right next step for my personal professional practice and also an exciting opportunity for our school.

I have two main goals for my project:

- I want to develop a curriculum unit that can be added immediately to my 2025-2026 school year curriculum calendar. This would include lesson materials, a scope and sequence, and formative and summative assessments (research and a narrative). It would also include recommendations for a community showcase of student work.
- I want to create a resource set that can be shared with Codman staff to facilitate cross-curricular collaboration. Photos, videos, interview transcripts, research, and other curricular materials will be useful not just in my Humanities course but also our many STEM course offerings (including Environmental Science).

I want to promote the use of high-quality primary-source research materials at Codman Academy, and I believe it would be hugely beneficial to my colleagues if I was able to develop and share a complete, model curriculum unit such as the one I am proposing. In an age when so much information (and misinformation) is readily available on phones and computers, the art and science of traditional research can get lost. This project is an opportunity to model high-quality research for our students and staff. Furthermore, Codman Academy is part of the EL Schools network, and I would submit an application to present this research and aligned curricular materials at the 2025 EL Education national conference.

At the end of the curriculum unit, students will have practiced rigorous research, reading, and writing skills to produce narratives that highlight the work environmental activists have done to advocate for social and political change in the United States. Our research, and students' narratives, will be shared with the community in a learning showcase, educating the community about environmental activism.

Timeline

- July: Travel to Washington D.C. for one week to tour the Capitol, visit key Smithsonian Institution Museums, interview local activists and lawmakers, and gather research and supplementary curricular materials
- July-August: Develop curriculum unit
- August: Present research and curricular materials to colleagues during Codman Academy's summer professional development for teachers
- September: Add curricular unit to Humanities 10 Honors curriculum calendar
- Spring 2026: Host community showcase of research and student work