

# Responding to the Insurrection at the US Capitol

Last updated January 6, 2021.

**We are working on additional materials to help you address the events of January 6, 2021 with your students.**

**Sign up below to receive our upcoming Teaching Ideas and current events resources.**

---

In his 1963 essay “A Talk to Teachers,” James Baldwin wrote: “American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”<sup>1</sup> In the events surrounding the recent presidential election in the United States, the essential truth of Baldwin’s statement resonates anew.

This week’s news alone, including the historic results of the Georgia senatorial runoff election and the attack on Congress, is provoking a whirlwind of conflicting emotions among Americans, as many are simultaneously buoyed by the expanding representation in our government and disturbed, angered, and frightened by the attack on the halls of Congress and our democratic system of government. In the days following these events, students will need opportunities to feel and express their emotions as well as support in separating facts from misinformation and sharing the news responsibly.

This Teaching Idea is designed to help guide an initial classroom reflection on the insurrection at the US Capitol that occurred on January 6, 2021. We will continue to publish resources on our [Current Events](#) page as this story evolves over the coming weeks.

## BEFORE TEACHING

### 1. Start with Yourself

Self-reflection is important preparation for facilitating conversations about troubling current events. As educators, we have to make time to process our own feelings and become aware of the way our own identities and experiences shape the perspectives we hold. Read the “Start with Yourself” section on page 2 of our [Fostering Civil Discourse](#) guide. Then reflect on the following questions:

- What emotions does news of the insurrection at the Capitol raise for you? What questions are you grappling with?
- What perspectives will you bring to your reflection on these events with your students?
- What emotions might your students bring to your discussion? How can you respond to these emotions?
- As the news develops, how will you continue to learn alongside your students?

## 2. Coordinate with Colleagues

Before you discuss these events with your class, it may be helpful to talk to other teachers in your school about how they plan to respond. This can ensure that students have space to reflect, while also helping to avoid repeating the same conversations with students throughout the day.

## 3. Adapt for Remote Instruction

If you are teaching remotely, it can be challenging to facilitate meaningful and emotional conversations. Consider using the remote teaching guidance in our [Fostering Civil Discourse Guide](#) to help you plan your conversation. Additionally, the following teaching strategies can help facilitate meaningful reflection or discussion, and they all provide adaptations for remote instruction:

- [Journals](#) can help students process their thoughts and feelings. While learning remotely, students may benefit from having added opportunities to reflect individually before participating in remote discussions.
- [Graffiti Boards](#) can help students “hear” each other’s ideas, give students space and time to process emotional material, and create a record of students’ ideas and questions that can be referred to at a later point.
- [Wraparound](#) asks students to share aloud a quick response to a prompt. It provides an efficient way for all students in a

classroom to share their ideas about a question, topic, or text, revealing common themes and ideas in students' thinking.

## INITIAL CLASSROOM RESPONSE

In the midst of troubling and fast-moving events, it can be beneficial to focus first on emotional processing, addressing the “heart” before the “head.” In your first conversation with your students about the events of January 6, 2021, provide them space to reflect on their emotional responses to the event and surface questions they are sitting with.

### 1. Contract with Your Class

Let your students know that their learning environment is a safe and brave space. Begin with a brief [Contracting](#) activity if you have not already forged that space in your classroom. If you have already established a class contract, invite your students to add to or modify the contract to support this conversation using the following questions to prompt students' thinking:

- Which norms in our class contract are most important for guiding a meaningful conversation about the news of the extremist mob that attacked the US Capitol and why?
- Are there any new norms we need to add?

**Remote Learning Note:** Use our teaching strategy [Contracting for Remote Learning](#) to create two contracts with your class, one for in-person learning and one for remote learning.

### 2. Share What We Know

Breaking news changes quickly, and students may not know the most recent information, or they may have seen or read misinformation about the insurrection on January 6, 2021. Consider sharing a few bullet points or a resource from a trusted news outlet to establish baseline knowledge of the events and dispel misinformation. (**Note:** You can find a list of reliable news outlets in our [Current Events Teacher Checklist](#).)

It may also be helpful to share a definition of the term *insurrection* with your students, such as “an act of revolting against an established government,” and explain that the events on January 6, 2021 involved people attempting to disrupt our democratically-elected government.<sup>2</sup>

**Remote Learning Note:** Share a few key bullet points summarizing the news with your students during a synchronous session, or share the bullet points with your students and ask them to review them asynchronously.

### 3. Create Space for Student Reflection

The classroom is a place where students should learn with intellectual rigor, emotional engagement, and ethical reflection, and come to understand that their own views and choices matter. We represent those core educational values in Facing History's "pedagogical triangle."

This integration of head, heart, and ethics is always important to learning, and it's particularly crucial when students are considering contentious and troubling news. Tell students that you want them to use their head, heart, and conscience in today's discussion. Invite them to open their journals, or a notebook, to reflect on questions related to the three points of the triangle. Tell students that these reflections will be private unless they choose to share them.

Questions you might use to prompt reflection include:

- **Head:** What information do we currently know about the insurrection that happened on January 6, 2021? What additional facts or information would you like to have?
- **Heart:** How do you feel about the insurrection and what is happening in the aftermath? Are there particular moments or images that stand out to you?
- **Conscience:** What do you believe was at stake in the events on January 6, 2021? What questions about right and wrong, fairness or injustice, did insurrection raise for you? How should individuals or politicians act in order to protect our democratic institutions?

Invite students to share any reflections they wish to, but also give students the option to keep their reflections private. Possible ways to share include:

- Ask your students to write short reflections or questions using the [Graffiti Board](#) teaching strategy. Address as many of your students' responses as you have time for and then save the graffiti board to help guide future discussions.
- Ask students to share a word or phrase from their journal entries using the [Wraparound](#) teaching strategy.

**Remote Learning Note:** Students can reflect in their journals asynchronously before joining a synchronous or asynchronous

discussion. Use our teaching strategy [Journaling in a Remote Learning Environment](#) for guidance on setting up student journals during remote learning. Ask students to share using our teaching strategy [Graffiti Boards \(Remote Learning\)](#) or [Wraparound \(Remote Learning\)](#).

#### 4. Explore Strategies for Following the News

After you have given students time to reflect and process their initial responses to the event, you may decide to guide your students through strategies for engaging with news coverage of the event in a responsible way.

News coverage on breaking events is often incomplete and may include information that is later discounted. In addition, misinformation about the election contributed to the insurrection that occurred on January 6, 2021. Students should understand that established news sources are less likely to spread misinformation, since they have processes for vetting stories before publishing.

Begin by asking your students the following questions:

- What questions should you consider before sharing news on social media or with friends?
- Do you have any strategies to make sure that the news you follow is reliable?

Share the News Literacy Project's resource [How to know what to trust](#) and have students look over the steps it recommends following to determine whether a source is reliable. Ask your students:

- Do you employ any of these strategies already? If so, which ones?
- Do any of these strategies surprise you? Why or why not?

Invite students to write down their goals for how they will follow the news. Prompt them to respond to the following questions:

- What can you do to ensure that the news and information you use to form your opinions is accurate?
- How will you decide what news to share with your friends or family or post on social media?
- What effect could misinformation have on our democracy?

**Remote Learning Note:** Ask students to reflect on the two initial questions individually. Then, ask them to share a short response, either synchronously or asynchronously, using the [Wraparound \(Remote Learning\)](#) strategy.

## Citations

- 1 : James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers" (October 16, 1963), in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985* (Macmillan, 1985), 325.
- 2 : This definition is adapted from Merriam-Webster, "[Insurrection](#)".

Get More Tips for Teaching Current Events

Sign up to receive our latest resources in a short biweekly email.

**Email\***

**Postal Code\***

*You may unsubscribe from these communications at any time. For more information on how to unsubscribe and our privacy practices, please review our [Privacy Policy](#). By clicking submit, you consent to allow Facing History to store and process the personal information you've submitted.*

protected by reCAPTCHA

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

[https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/responding-insurrection-us-capitol?fbclid=IwAR23Ze5oe6z4KqWmI2X6RejCCp8Sv-yg\\_79yEMAMDGT8woC1J5tffPzC514](https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/responding-insurrection-us-capitol?fbclid=IwAR23Ze5oe6z4KqWmI2X6RejCCp8Sv-yg_79yEMAMDGT8woC1J5tffPzC514)

Copyright © 2021 Facing History and Ourselves. We are a registered 501 (c) (3) charity. [Privacy Policy](#)

Our headquarters are located at:  
16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445  
[Accessibility Feedback](#)