OUR SHARED STORY:
DISABILITY COMMUNITIES AND BELONGING IN INDIANAPOLIS

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIANAPOLIS

Primary Grades Lesson Plan



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Nothing About Us Without Us: The Story of Disability Rights

Lesson Plan by Dr. Courtney Jarrett

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Introduction

Disability History in the Indiana Classroom

The history of Indiana is often defined by its milestones in industry, agriculture, and sports, yet one of its most transformative social narratives, the struggle for disability rights, remained "invisible" in classrooms for decades. These lesson plans for the primary, intermediary, and secondary grades seek to rectify that silence by positioning Indianapolis not just as a state capital, but as a primary battleground for civil rights. By tracing the evolution from the "medical model" of the early twentieth century to the modern "social model" of inclusion, these lessons challenge students to see the physical and legal landscape of their capital city through the lens of activism.

In the primary grades curriculum, students begin their journey by becoming accessibility detectives, learning how the built environment of Indianapolis was intentionally reshaped by Hoosier families who refused to accept the isolation of their children. Moving into the intermediary grades, the focus shifts to the mechanics of conflict and resolution. Students evaluate how organizations like The Arc of Indiana and accessABILITY acted as bridge-builders, transforming a societal clash over institutionalization into a sustainable framework for community living.

Finally, at the secondary grade level, the narrative is integrated into the broader tapestry of United States history. High schoolers engage in historiography, using the Indiana Disability History Project to analyze how the political shifts of the 1980s and the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mirrored the efforts of other marginalized groups to assert their civic rights.

Together, these lessons move beyond awareness and into the realm of critical historical inquiry. They highlight figures like Alice Wong and the thousands of unnamed advocates who turned the steps of the Indiana State House into a stage for justice. By investigating primary sources and evaluating the efficacy of social policy, students across all grade levels will discover that the ramps, braille signs, and inclusive parks of Indianapolis are more than modern conveniences; they are the hard-won victories of a movement that continues to redefine what it means to be a Hoosier.

Moving Forward Together

Disability Activism in Indiana

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time:	Materials:
90–120 Minutes (can be split into two sessions)	Video clip, primary source images, art supplies, key vocabulary cards

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the actions of Hoosier activists change Indiana from a place of "hiding" people with disabilities to a place of "including" them?

Students will learn about the shift in Indiana's history from institutionalization (Central State Hospital) to community-based living and civil rights. They will explore the role of local activists and the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on the landscape of Indianapolis.

Indiana Academic Standards

**Based on the 2023 Indiana Academic Standards for Social Studies*

Grade 4 Social Studies:

4.H.11 Identify and describe important events and movements that changed life in Indiana from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

4.H.13 Create and interpret timelines that show relationships among people, events, and movements in the history of Indiana.

4.H.14 Construct a brief narrative about an event in Indiana history using primary and secondary sources.

4.H.15 Research and describe the contributions of important Indiana artists and writers to the state's cultural landscape.

Lesson Sequence

Step 1—The Hook: The "Invisible" Barrier (15 minutes)

Activity: Place a piece of candy or a cool sticker on a high shelf or behind a "barrier" (like a taped-off area) that only some students can reach based on a random rule (e.g., "Only students wearing blue can cross this line").

Discussion: Ask students: "Is this fair? How does it feel to be left out because of a rule or a building design?" Introduce the word *Accessibility*.

Step 2—Direct Instruction: Indiana's Journey (20 minutes)

The Past: Briefly explain that in the mid-twentieth century, many Hoosiers with disabilities were sent to live in large institutions like Central State Hospital in Indianapolis. They were often separated from their families.

The Movement: Explain that in the 1970s and 80s, parents and people with disabilities in Indiana began to protest. They wanted to go to local schools, have jobs, and live in their own neighborhoods.

The Win: Mention the ADA (1990) and how Indianapolis changed (ramps on buses, curb cuts on sidewalks, elevators in the State House).

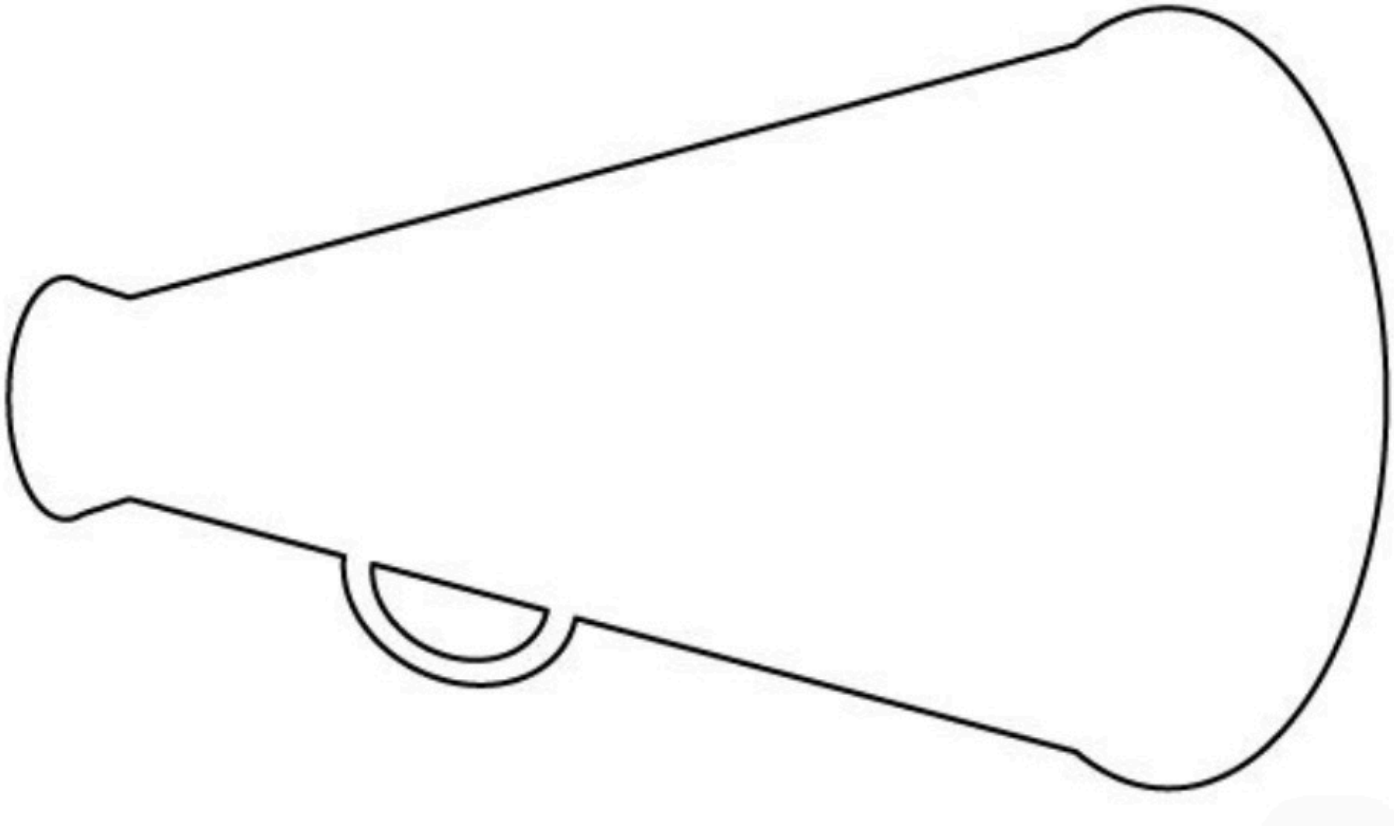
Step 3—Guided Practice: Local Hero Spotlight (20 minutes)

Introduce Alice Wong, a famous activist from Indianapolis. Show how her work started by simply asking for her school to be more inclusive. Review the Indiana Disability History Project website together to show that history is made of real people telling their stories.

NAME _____ DATE _____

Make Your Voice Heard!

Directions: *Write a slogan inside the megaphone for a cause you care about regarding inclusion. Decorate it with symbols of Indiana pride.*



NAME _____ DATE _____

“Then & Now” Photo Analysis

Directions: *Review both photos on the next page. List three differences you see and explain how the movement “changed life in Indiana”*

Photo A	Photo B	How have these differences changed life in Indiana?



Central State Hospital, 1929 | Credit: Indiana Historical Society



Newfields, ca. 2020s | Credit: Newfields

NAME _____ DATE _____

Detective Log

Directions: *Walk around the school. Check off any features you find below.*

- ☐ Braille on signs
- ☐ Ramps (indoor or outdoor)
- ☐ Elevators
- ☐ Wide doorways
- ☐ Video captions
- ☐ Captions or descriptions of photos/images

Did you find a spot that isn't accessible? Draw a "Fix-It" solution.

NAME _____ DATE _____

The Change-Maker

Directions: *Choose one Indiana event or movement we talked about in this lesson. Describe how it made life better for people living in Indianapolis today.*

Further Resources

Encyclopedia of Indianapolis

Central State Hospital

https://indyencyclopedia.org/central-state-hospital/

Henry Jackson Lewis

https://indyencyclopedia.org/henry-jackson-lewis/

Bradford Woods

https://indyencyclopedia.org/bradford-woods/

Easter Seals Crossroads

https://indyencyclopedia.org/easterseals-crossroads/

Indiana School for the Blind

https://indyencyclopedia.org/indiana-school-for-the-blind-and-visually-impaired/

Indiana School for the Deaf

https://indyencyclopedia.org/indiana-school-for-the-deaf/

Bosma Enterprises

https://indyencyclopedia.org/bosma-enterprises/

Other

River Heritage Park

https://www.carmelclayparks.com/parks/river-heritage-park/

Indiana Disability History Timeline

https://www.indianadisabilityhistory.org/time

Kelsey Cowley - Being a Voice for Change

https://www.indianadisabilityhistory.org/items/show/250

Additional Educational Resources

https://www.indianadisabilityhistory.org/eduprod

Alice Wong

https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/author/alwong199/

Alice Wong

https://cherrylakepublishing.com/shop/show/53456

Indiana History Disability Project

https://www.indianadisabilityhistory.org/index.php

Notes