OUR SHARED STORY:
DISABILITY COMMUNITIES AND BELONGING IN INDIANAPOLIS

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIANAPOLIS

Secondary Grades Lesson Plan



Lesson Plan made possible by a generous grant from the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation.

© 2026 Encyclopedia of Indianapolis. This work is openly licensed via CC BY-NC-SA

This license enables reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.

Nothing About Us Without Us: The Story of Disability Rights

Lesson Plan by Dr. Courtney Jarrett

Dr. Courtney Jarrett, ADAC, is the Director of Disability Services at Ball State University, supporting over 6,200 students. A triple BSU alumna, she is a past president of Indiana AHEAD and Affiliate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies. Dr. Jarrett is a published researcher and author of the textbook *Not Your Momma's Feminism* (3rd ed., 2025). Her accolades include the ATHENA Young Professional and LEAP Indiana Awards. Deeply involved in the Muncie community, she serves as a precinct committee person and a Shafer Leadership Academy Ambassador. In her free time, she enjoys traveling with her family and reading for fun.

Contents

Introduction **5**

The "Silent" Civil Rights **6**

Lesson Overview 6

Indiana Academic Standards 7

Lesson Sequence 9

Primary Source Bias and Perspective Matrix 10

Media and the Democratic Process 11

The 1980–Present Impact Assessment 12

The Policy Memo 13

Addressing Complex Causes 13

Further Resources **14**

Notes **16**

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 seeks 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 20th 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.

The "Silent" Civil Rights

Disability Advocacy and the Indiana Landscape

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time:	Materials:
3–4 Class Periods (50 Minutes each)	Digital archive access, Primary sources, Worksheets

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How does the disability rights movement parallel and intersect with the efforts of women & ethnic minorities to assert civic rights post-WWII? (USH.7.1)

2. How did the transition from Kennedy-Johnson era social programs to 1980s–present political shifts affect the institutionalization versus inclusion conflict in Indiana? (USH.7.3, USH.8.1)

3. To what extent did media and self-advocacy influence the passage of the ADA and the closure of Central State Hospital? (USH.9.3)

This lesson offers an exploration of the disability rights movement as a pivotal yet often underrepresented chapter in American civil rights history. By focusing on the late 20th-century landscape of Indianapolis, students will analyze how the transition from the "Medical Model" of disability—centered on institutionalization and "cures"—to the "Social Model"—focused on civil rights and systemic

accessibility—redefined the Hoosier experience. Students will examine the legislative shift from the Great Society programs of the Kennedy-Johnson era to the landmark passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990.

The curriculum challenges students to function as historians by engaging with the Indiana Disability History Project. Through the analysis of oral histories, legal texts, and media coverage of events like the "Capitol Crawl," students will evaluate the complex interplay between grassroots activism and political policy. They will investigate how the closure of institutions like Central State Hospital was not merely an administrative decision, but the result of intense advocacy by organizations such as The Arc of Indiana. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to synthesize multiple historical perspectives to argue how social, economic, and political forces converged to move Indiana toward a future of inclusion.

Indiana Academic Standards

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

United States History:

USH.7.1 Explain the efforts of groups of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and women to assert their social and civic rights in the years following World War II.

USH.7.3 Assess the social and economic programs of the Kennedy-Johnson era, including policies and legal rulings.

USH.8.1 Explain the significance of social, economic, and political issues during the period 1980 to the present and how these issues affected individuals and organizations.

USH.9.3 Reflect on the role of media and social media in the democratic process.

USH.10.1 Cultivate historical thinking, including the ability to evaluate competing explanations for historical change.

USH.10.2 Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past; discover possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary opinions.

USH.10.3 Analyze multiple, unexpected, and complex causes and effects of events in the past. Assess competing historical interpretations of a particular historical moment, event, or change.

USH.10.5 Develop arguments, defended with historical evidence, which explain historical change.

Indiana Studies:

IS.1.30 Explain the significance of social, economic, and political issues during the period 1980 to the present and the ways in which these issues affected individuals and organizations.

IS.1.34 Conduct historical research that incorporates information literacy skills such as forming appropriate research questions, evaluating information by determining its accuracy, relevance and comprehensiveness, interpreting a variety of primary and secondary sources, and presenting their findings with documentation.

IS.1.35 Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past. Discover possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary opinions.

IS.1.36 Analyze multiple, unexpected and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

IS.1.37 Formulate and present a position or course of action on an issue by examining the underlying factors contributing to that issue.

IS.1.38 Research and describe the contributions of important Indiana artists and writers to the state's cultural landscape.

Lesson Sequence

Day 1—The Historical Context (The Medical vs. Social Model)

Instruction: Trace the evolution of disability treatment from the 1907 Eugenics Law (USH.7.1) through the Great Society programs (USH.7.3). Discuss how "social programs" of the 1960s often still relied on institutionalization.

Activity: Compare the rhetoric of "protection" in early twentieth-century Indiana documents with the rhetoric of "rights" in the 1970s.

Day 2—The Movement in the 1980s and 1990s (Politics and Media)

Instruction: Focus on the shift toward the ADA (1990). Discuss the 1980s political climate—balancing economic concerns with social civil rights (USH.8.1).

Media Analysis: View footage of the "Capitol Crawl" and local Indianapolis news coverage of advocacy at the Indiana State House.

Day 3—Historical Research and Synthesis

Lab Time: Students use the Indiana Disability History Project to conduct research on specific Indiana figures (like Alice Wong or parent advocates from The Arc)(IS.1.34, IS.1.35).

Evaluation: Discuss the limitations of oral history versus government records (USH.10.2).

NAME _____ DATE _____

Primary Source Bias and Perspective Matrix

Directions: *History is rarely a single story; it is a collection of competing perspectives. In this activity, you will analyze three distinct documents from Indiana's past.*

1. Identify: For each source, identify the author, the date, and the "model" of disability they represent (Medical vs. Social).
2. Analyze Bias: Look for "loaded" language. How does the author describe people with disabilities? (e.g., as "patients" to be cured or "citizens" with rights?)
3. Evaluate Limitations: What information is missing from this source? Whose voice is not being heard? Record your findings in the matrix.

Source Author/ Date	Medical or Social Model	Key Terms Used	Limitations/Biases
Source A			
Source B			
Source C			

NAME _____ DATE _____

Media and the Democratic Process

Directions: *The "Capitol Crawl" of 1990 is considered one of the most effective pieces of political theater in US history.*

1. *Analyze the provided information about the event. How does the visual of activists leaving their wheelchairs to crawl up the US Capitol steps challenge the viewer?*
2. *In the "Framing the Message" section of your worksheet, explain how this media coverage pressured politicians during the 1980–1990 era.*
3. *Discuss whether the movement would have been as successful in the "pre-television" era. How does media visibility translate into democratic power?*

Compare	Framing the Message	Reflection

NAME _____ DATE _____

The 1980–Present Impact Assessment

Directions: *Using the Indiana Disability History Project digital archive, you will perform a "Trace Study" on the impact of modern legislation. Choose one oral history transcript from the archive dated after 1980. List specific political or economic issues mentioned. Describe how these issues specifically affected the individual interviewed and the organizations they interacted with. Summarize how high-level political shifts in the last 40 years created tangible changes in the daily lives of Indianapolis residents.*

Political/Economic Issues	Effect	Synthesis

NAME _____ DATE _____

The Policy Memo: Addressing Complex Causes

Directions: *You are a Senior Policy Analyst for the Indiana Governor's Office in the late 1990s. Write a formal memo explaining why the state is moving away from large institutions (like Central State) toward community-based care. Your argument must include at least three "complex causes": one economic (cost of facilities), one political (the ADA), and one social (activism from groups like The Arc). Incorporate a quote or reference from a contemporary Indiana writer (e.g., Alice Wong) to demonstrate how the cultural landscape of Indiana has shifted. Use historical evidence to defend your final recommendation.*

Further Resources

Encyclopedia of Indianapolis

Central State Hospital

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

Noble Inc.

https://indyencyclopedia.org/noble-inc/

Bradford Woods

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

Indiana School for the Blind

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

CICOA

https://indyencyclopedia.org/cicoa-aging-and-in-home-solutions-inc/

IndyGo

https://indyencyclopedia.org/indygo/

Bosma Enterprises

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

Other

Conceptualizing Disability

https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/disability-models

Medical vs Social Models of Disability

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWGv8FcrqRs

Medical and Social Models of Disability

https://odpc.ucsf.edu/content/medical-and-social-models-of-disability

Arc of Indiana

https://www.arcind.org/

Indiana Disability Rights

https://www.in.gov/idr/

Self Advocates of Indiana

https://saind.org/

IndyGo Access

https://www.indygo.net/access/

accessAbility

https://www.abilityindiana.org/

Alice Wong

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

Capitol Crawl

https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/iconic-civil-rights-protest-you-dontknow/

Capitol Crawl

https://www.history.com/articles/americans-with-disabilities-act-1990-capitol-crawl

Lives Worth Living

https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/lives-worth-living/

Advocate Group

https://www.wfyi.org/statewide/2026-05-14/new-statewide-group-to-advocate-for-peoplewith-disabilities

Notes