

Juanita Craft

A Texas-Sized Civil Rights Icon

TEACHER EDITION
9-12

STATE FAIR OF TEXAS
CURRICULUM

Juanita Craft, born Juanita Jewel Shanks in 1902, was an American civil rights activist, politician, and an icon for her ability to organize and guide youth groups. Her work was pivotal in the civil rights movement, particularly in Dallas, Texas.

The granddaughter of slaves, Craft felt the impact of racial discrimination early in life. In 1918, when Craft was 16, her mother died of tuberculosis because she was denied hospital treatment based on the color of her skin. Understandably this tragedy, possibly avoidable had her mother been cared for properly by medical personnel, had a huge impact on Craft's future as an unwavering champion of social justice. Craft went on to attain a college education but upon moving to Dallas could only find work as a bell woman at the Adolphus Hotel. A trained seamstress and milliner, she later worked as a dressmaker.

Interested in fighting job discrimination, Craft joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1935, and there found her life's purpose. First appointed membership chair in Dallas, she went on to become a Texas NAACP field organizer, helping establish more than 180 branches of the NAACP. Craft was the first black woman in Dallas County to vote in a public election and served two terms on the Dallas City Council between 1975 and 1979. She also worked successfully to integrate the University of Texas Law School, University of North Texas and Dallas Independent School District.

Dallas public schools had a particularly harsh road to desegregation. In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled against the Topeka Board of Education, declaring segregation in schools was unconstitutional. Dallas dug in, refusing to abide by the ruling and continued to have segregated schools. Although progress toward desegregation began in 1961, there was a long fight ahead of Craft and other activists to truly change the racial injustices within the school district. Not until 2003 was Dallas ISD officially ruled desegregated.



Craft's house in South Dallas was often used as an organizing space for both youth and adult activists, and still stands today as a monument to the Civil Rights Movement. Situated in what was once an all-white neighborhood near the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X boulevards, the area was targeted by racist bombings in the early 1950's in an attempt to scare Craft and other activists away. However, she was not intimidated and lived in the same house the rest of her life.

Craft's work with youth is legendary. The NAACP Youth Council she organized in Dallas in the 1940's was the first of its kind and became the model for other youth branches throughout the country. Under Craft's guidance, youth in the council were inspired by speakers who were active in the Civil Rights movement, including college students who became role models for the younger participants. Through these sessions, youth learned why the NAACP existed, studied the causes supported by the NAACP, were well-informed of what was happening in other cities and absorbed the tenets of civil disobedience.

Craft was a leader in teaching and modeling the importance of assembling in order to advocate successfully for what is right and just, and worked with the Youth Council to organize sit-ins, picket lines and other peaceful assemblies across the city to protest racial injustice. The youth silk-screened t-shirts and made posters to support their local demonstrations and also recruited new members (both youth and adult) for the NAACP.

Fighting against the segregation of the State Fair of Texas was a pivotal part of her work. For decades, the State Fair deemed "Negro Achievement Day" the only day that black people could visit the Fair. Starting in 1955, Craft organized years of peaceful protests with her youth and others until the Fair was fully desegregated in 1967. She went on to build strong relationships with Fair officials, and her memorial service was held at the Hall of State in Fair Park in 1985. To commemorate her legacy, the State Fair of Texas established an annual award in her honor in 2018.

Celebrated for her tireless efforts in fighting for civil rights, she received the NAACP Golden Heritage Life Membership Award in 1978 and the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award in 1984. Multiple Dallas locations are named in her honor, including the Juanita Craft Recreation Center, The Juanita J. Craft Swimming Pool, the Juanita Craft Post Office and the Juanita J. Craft Civil Rights House. She attended the inauguration of three US presidents - something that was uncommon during her lifetime. Although Craft passed away in 1985, her legacy and tireless efforts fighting for racial justice and civil rights remain, and the young people she mentored continue as adults to work toward a complete and just society.

In this lesson, students will:

- ★ Explore and discuss the life and legacy of Juanita Craft
- ★ Define and discuss the Civil Rights Act
- ★ Create a presentation or write a paper based on their knowledge and understanding of the impact of Juanita Craft's work on civil rights
- ★ Create a piece of activist art based on Juanita Craft's work and inspired by the style of Banksy



Standards

- ★ World History: 20(A)(B), 21(F), 30(B)(C)
- ★ World Geography: 15(A)(B), 21(E)
- ★ US History Studies Since 1877: 3(C), 9(C)(D)(G)(I), 25(A)(D)(C), 29(A)
- ★ US Government: 6(F), 12(B), 13(A), 19(B), 20(B)
- ★ Psychology: 13(B), 14(D), 15(B)(D)
- ★ Sociology: 3(A), 11(D)(E), 20(B)(D)
- ★ ELAR: 15(A)(D), 16(A)
- ★ Art 1: 1(D), 2(A)(D)(F), 4(A)

Before You Go

Materials: Pencil, paper, student access to the provided Juanita Craft biography in digital or hard copy, and technology (Chromebook, iPad, or another device if allowed)

On the Board or Projector: Display the seven questions below and instruct students to copy them down on a sheet of paper. They should leave space to answer each question. Also, mention that answering the Essential Question on the second sheet of paper will be an exit ticket for the day.

- ★ The Declaration of Independence states, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." How was the government able to deny these unalienable rights to African Americans?
- ★ Define the NAACP and explain their role in desegregation.

- ★ What were some of the NAACP's activities during the 1950s and 1960s?
- ★ Describe what the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did for minorities. Which president signed it into law?
- ★ What role did Juanita Craft play in desegregating the State Fair of Texas?
- ★ How did Craft's activism on human rights serve as an example to others?
- ★ How did opposing views on equal rights influence the culture during the 1950s and 1960s? How did Craft try to change the mainstream point of view?

Essential Question: How did Juanita Craft expand opportunities and rights for African Americans in society? (Writing prompt at the end of class.)

After students have written down the questions, take time to read each question to students so that they know what they should be able to answer throughout the lesson.

Then discuss the first question about unalienable rights. (This may be something you've already talked about in other lessons, so this is a great opportunity to re-spiral the information). Be sure to explain that unalienable rights are rights that cannot be taken away by the government and these three distinct rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Ask students if they can think of instances where these rights have been denied. Discuss how until the 1960's African Americans were denied these rights due to segregation laws.

Have students view the following video to introduce the issues of segregation. Instruct them to write down five things they observe in the video to discuss afterwards. <https://texaslakestrail.com/plan-your-adventure/historic-sites-and-cities/sites/juanita-j-craft-civil-rights-house>

- ★ After the video, discuss with students the issues that were created by segregation.
- ★ Ask students to name the political organization mentioned in the video that promoted the rights of African Americans. (They should be able to identify the NAACP.)
- ★ Next, explain that this organization was pivotal during the Civil Rights Movement in raising awareness and helping African Americans gain the rights they were wrongfully denied.
- ★ Take a moment to allow students to define the NAACP and look up (very quickly—2 minutes at most) on their electronic devices what the organization's role was in desegregation and its activities during the 1950's and 1960's. They should write the

answer on their paper. Remind students to put this in their own words and write in full sentences when answering this question. Also, although they should already know, remind them about using valid sources.

- ★ Take another moment to allow students to look up the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and how it affected American society.
- ★ It is important to note and explain to students that racism is an ideology that developed from the institution of slavery in American society. It has created justifications for laws that restrict African Americans. It also has been used to justify the unfair treatment of African Americans and led to institutionalized racism in American society.

Following the class discussion, show students the video at the link below to introduce them to Juanita Craft and her work in and around Dallas. Instruct them to write down at least five things they observe in the video to discuss after watching.

<https://vimeo.com/270924864>

- ★ When the video concludes, have students read the provided biography of Juanita Craft individually or as a group, then ask students to Think-Pair-Share.
 - Give them 30 seconds to think and write down something they want to share and one minute to discuss with a partner what they saw in the video or read in the bio and wrote down.
 - Next, spend a few minutes asking students to share something that they learned or discussed with their partners (adjust the times at your discretion). Either call on students randomly or ask for volunteers.
 - Be sure to touch on these main points, if they are not brought up by the students:

- * She was the first black woman to vote in Dallas County.
 - * She helped desegregate several Texas institutions, particularly in the Dallas area, including the State Fair of Texas.
 - * Take this opportunity to point out that youth were advocating for equal rights too—it was not limited to adults.
 - * Her home was an organizing space for youth and adult organizers.
 - * Her home was also a meeting space for heads of state, Presidents and other national leaders.
- ★ Ask students to imagine what life may have been like as an African American in Dallas in the 1950s, before desegregation.
- Explain that historically the State Fair of Texas only allowed African Americans to attend on one day, Negro Achievement Day. Even then, not all the vendors and rides were open to them.
 - Explain to them that Craft and others wanted to change this and advocated for desegregation.
 - Be sure to define the word activist for students.
 - Tell students to brainstorm ways to advocate for a cause and have them write down some examples.
 - Give them about two to three minutes.
 - First, have them discuss this with a partner, then as a class. They should come up with things like, protesting, petitions, organizing, and boycotts. (And if they don't, talk about these and what they are).

Next, explain how in 1955, Craft activated the Youth Council of the Dallas NAACP to picket outside of the State Fair on Negro Achievement Day. She urged African Americans to visit the Fair every day but Negro Achievement Day to draw attention to the

unfairness of the segregation at the event. Explain that the Fair did not fully desegregate until the 1960s.

- ★ Have students take turns reading aloud the following article to the class or have them work in small groups or with partners to read over the piece. <https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/artifacts/naacp-state-fair-spotlight-012315>

To close, have students answer the Essential Question (How did Craft help expand opportunities and rights for African Americans?)

- ★ Tell them their response should be five to seven sentences, in paragraph form, and should include examples as evidence.
- ★ Allow them to use an electronic device to answer this question.
- ★ Give students about 10 minutes and have them turn the activity in as they leave class.



While You're There

Provide copies of the Student Edition and have students complete the activities while at the State Fair. Students should take notes while at the State Fair and bring them to class for a discussion of their findings.

Essential Questions:

- ★ How did the contributions of Juanita Craft shape the culture in Dallas?
- ★ How did she influence the overall fight for civil rights in America?
- ★ What responsibility do we have in working toward equality in today's society?
- ★ How do our experiences shape who we are and what we are passionate about?

★ Juanita Craft House Museum

- This link will take you to the National Park Service (NPS) website for the Juanita J. Craft Civil Rights House: <https://www.nps.gov/places/texas-juanita-j-craft-civil-rights-house.htm>
- Before going to the Fair, have students read about the Juanita J. Craft Civil Rights House and, if possible, visit the house. The information and experience

★ The Juanita Craft Humanitarian Awards Ceremony

- This link will take you to the site for this year's ceremony: <https://bigtex.com/event/juanita-craft-humanitarian-awards-ceremony/>
- If you can attend, instruct students to document the honorees and how they are continuing Juanita Craft's legacy.

★ African American Museum

- African American Museum that houses exhibits on significant individuals and their contributions to society.
- Have them relate what they observe in the displays to Craft's activism.



After the Fair

Option 1:

Give students the following writing prompt that ties together the previous discussions:

- ★ Evaluate the impact of Juanita Craft's social activism during the Civil Rights Movement. How have her efforts influenced further activism, both in Texas and across the nation, that has led to positive changes in American culture?

Some suggested items to address:

- ★ How did Craft's activism anticipate the Civil Rights Act?
- ★ How did American society nurture and institutionalize a racist ideology?
- ★ Are the effects of this ideology apparent in society today? How?
- ★ Why was it important for some people during the civil rights era to put aside their racist ideologies for the public good?
- ★ How have others continued to raise awareness about issues of human rights denied to some individuals in society?
- ★ How can we work together to ensure equality today?

Suggested criteria:

- ★ The essay should be at least four paragraphs and cite the civil rights contributions of at least one other activist in and around Texas.
- ★ It should include supporting evidence with at least two citations.

- ★ It should be organized and contain proper grammar and punctuation.
- ★ The essay should have a clear introduction and conclusion.

Have students create a video or a slide presentation to share with the class that outlines the legacy of Juanita Craft and her contributions to Dallas. Use the writing prompt and questions above as central points to address in the video or presentation.

Suggested criteria:

- ★ Slide Show (Google Slides, PowerPoint, Prezi):
 - The presentation should be at least ten slides and include a works cited slide.
 - Include pictures and backgrounds on each slide.
 - Cite at least three sources on the final slide.
- ★ Videos (Flipgrid, iVideo or other approved method)
 - The video should be at least five minutes.
 - The video should be informative and provide examples of Craft's activism.
 - The video should have credits at the end to cite sources.

Option 2:

Discuss the term “creative activism” with your students. Creative activism uses any form of art to create an effect or reaction intended to bring awareness to a cause or issue in society. Although all art forms are utilized for creative activism, for this project students will focus on poetry. (In the visual art component of the lesson, students will create visual works that focus on a societal issue).

Review this article with your students <https://mypoeticside.com/featured/protest-poet-activists>.

The article lists a number of relevant poets whose writings have and continue to effect a change in society. As you can see after reviewing them, most of them were alive and creating work during Craft's lifetime. Ask students to think about the following questions as you are discussing the poets from the article:

- ★ Are there common themes in their work?
- ★ If so, what are they?
- ★ How are the writers different?
- ★ What common threads do you see in their work and the activist work of Juanita Craft?

Once you have completed an in-depth discussion of the writers and their themes, students should create their own written works that focus on an issue in society. Students can write individually or partner in pairs, but they should create a poem or short essay that clearly states the issue they choose as well as communicates their stance. Students should share their works with the class when finished, and, if possible, display them for other students and administrators to see.



ART COMPONENT

Another form of creative activism is activist art. This type of art attempts to incite a change in society. This type of art tackles issues that negatively affect populations within society and evoke the need for awareness and action. The era of Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan and segregation was a dark period in American history. Many artists used their work to educate people on the atrocities that were occurring and to champion the cause of justice, including Juanita Craft. As discussed previously, Craft's house was a hub for activists – particularly young people in Dallas. They would often gather at her house to create T-shirts and posters that they would wear or carry during pickets or sit-ins. Activist art doesn't always hang in museums – it can be anywhere at any time.

One of the most famous activist artists working today is Banksy. Banksy is controversial not only for their art but also because no one knows the artist's true identity. Their work appears on objects and walls when it seems no one is looking. It is simple, yet powerful in its constant aim at political and social justice issues.

Discuss art and social justice using the Banksy examples below. Ask the students to describe what the works mean to them. To what issue or issues is Banksy trying to bring awareness? What elements in Banksy's work to make them successful as activist art? What, if

anything, makes them unsuccessful? How can art create change within society? How does the placement of the art affect its purpose and effectiveness?

After the discussion, explain to students that they will create their own activist art. Their piece will focus on the social and political issues that Juanita Craft tackled and fought against. The medium is up to you – the scale can be as large or small as you want.

When the students have finished, display the work together and have a critique. Have each student explain the creative choices they made to bring attention to their chosen issue and discuss how Juanita Craft worked to address the issue.

