

Democracy's Edge: Choosing to Save Our Country by Bringing Democracy to Life (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

A Guide for Educators

By Frances Moore Lappé

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“Democracy’s Edge provides students a way to move theory to practice. It gives them hope for the future...I have heard comments like "I have wanted to create positive social action and until now have not read a text that is so empowering." It is amazing to see the responses and the rekindling of passion.”

– Prof. Joan Bantz, Evergreen State College

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ABOUT "A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS"

Welcome to *Democracy's Edge*. The central goal of this work is to challenge readers to rethink the meaning of democracy. Through analysis and extensive use of contemporary examples, Lappé encourages readers to perceive democracy as an enriching, values-driven culture of engagement rather than as simply a distant, fixed structure of government.

Democracy's Edge is replete with stories of Americans of all ages and from all walks of life engaged in public problem solving. The author seeks to demonstrate that a new understanding and practice of democracy — Living Democracy — is already emerging, though still largely invisible. Lappé argues that this more dynamic, inclusive, fair, and accountable democratic culture is indispensable if we are successfully to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Suggested teaching companions to *Democracy's Edge*:

Professor Jan Hyatt at Allegheny College, who has taught *Democracy's Edge*, notes that it "is a practical application of both John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and Antonia Damasio's *The Feeling of What Happens*. It also fulfills the challenges," she notes, "of Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vista*" and Richard Rorty's *Achieving our Country*."

Other books that work well with *Democracy's Edge* are Alexis de Toqueville's *Democracy in America* and *Strong Democracy* by Benjamin Barber.

Early student responses to *Democracy's Edge*:

Also from Jan Hyatt at Allegheny College, "In our class, the two youngest girls have begun a campus wide 'pennies collection.' A different group will benefit each month. In November the money will go to a rural school in one of the Carolinas. The oldest male is making plans to go to his high school political science class over Christmas break to talk about 'living democracy', and one very big athletic looking boy, from a blue-collar family and the first to attend college, took *Democracy's Edge* home over fall break for his father to read, and Dad promised to do it! Finding "Praxis" is part of our course, as you no doubt already understand, so there will be much more from this group by mid-December."

Teaching Philosophy:

Living Democracy is based on the premise that each individual's voice, choices, and actions make a difference. We learn best through direct experience (see Chapter 10 on "Learning"). With this in mind, we have provided optional exercises designed to help students integrate their learning into their own lives and conceptual frameworks. The goal is to invite students to engage with the material in a personal way – to learn through their own and their fellow classmates' experiences, stories, reflections, and intuitions.

Possible "experiential learning"¹ exercises include:

- Role plays
- Decision Making exercises
- Evaluation exercises
- Case studies
- Personal stories (sharing)

This guide includes:

- Book summary
- Chapter-by-chapter synopsis, objectives, discussion questions, and suggested exercises
- Four hand-outs adapted from the book to aid discussion:

#1 Democracy: Two Frames

#2 Our Public Lives: Some Key Roles

#3 Two Ways of Thinking about Power in Public Life

#4 Contrasting Three Reasons for Getting Involved

Democracy's Edge website resources

In addition to many speeches, interviews and articles, your students will find:

1. Web links to living democracy organizations and movements covering economic life, politics, citizen organizing, media, food & farming and security:
<http://democracysedge.org/links.php>

¹ For more information on "experiential learning": <http://www.icel.umb.edu/pdf/el.pdf>

2. Stories from the Edge - short stories of citizens in action that have emerged since the publication of *Democracy's Edge*. <http://democracysedge.org/action.php>

DEMOCRACY'S EDGE

By Frances Moore Lappé (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2006)

*To save the democracy we thought we had,
we must take democracy to where it's never been.*

BOOK SUMMARY

Democracy's Edge is about hope – not sappy, wishful thinking; but hope grounded in a grasp of the root causes of spreading misery. The author proposes that we are in the midst of an extraordinary historical moment – one in which anti-democratic forces appear to be in ascendance while at the same time, invisible to most of us, a powerful current is stirring that may well take us to democracy's next historical stage. She casts aside the gloomy view that Americans are hopelessly divided, left vs. right and secular vs. religious, and uncovers widespread shared sentiment and common democratic innovation across these supposed barriers.

Part I: Living on Democracy's Edge argues that today's dominant understanding and practice of democracy are too weak to meet today's challenges. Lappé confronts the current assault on democratic values and identifies changes in contemporary culture that make possible the emergence of a stronger "Living Democracy." Living Democracy is the evolving practice of citizens reframing democracy's meaning – from something done *to us* or *for us* to democracy as an engaging, life-enhancing, everyday practice. Growing numbers of Americans recognize that today's problems are too pervasive, deep and complex to be solved by experts dispensing directives from above. So they are rethinking power, self-interest, and public life to put themselves at the center of problem solving. Principles of inclusivity, transparency, and mutual accountability, they show us, work not just in political life but in economic and cultural life as well.

Part II: Democracy Growing Up builds on Thomas Jefferson's insight that no generation should be constrained by the institutions of its "barbarous ancestors" but should shape new rules for new realities. The author takes on four constraining political and economic assumptions that lock us in continuing decline and shows how each is not as rigid as it appears. She zeroes in on the corporation, the "elephant in the living room" that seems to take up ever more space. She de-mystifies corporate power by showing that it flows from five forces that are each in flux because gutsy citizens are working to draw the corporation within the democratic fold.

Part III: Democracy as a Verb offers stories of democracy coming to life in everyday economics (from fair trade to worker ownership), politics (from community organizing networks to local government councils), food and farming (from community supported agriculture to farm-to-school programs) and the media (from low-power radio and microcinema to citizens standing up to the Federal Communications Commission). Each chapter defines the crisis of accelerating concentration and conveys the challenges and excitement of citizens finding their voices not just to protest but to innovate. Americans discover that Living Democracy is *not* a dreary duty; it is the essence of the good life.

Part IV Democracy in Our Bones explores how in our schools and community ties we cultivate democracy's habits of heart as well as its "arts." Using the experience of selected highly effective, democratic public schools, Lappé argues that effective education and educating for democracy are one and the same. A chapter on community security suggests that the humiliation of deepening poverty and the incarceration/punishment syndrome generate America's extraordinarily high rates of violence. Yet here, too, a sea change is underway.

Democracy's Edge ends by asking us to attend to framing appropriate language and images. The author includes specific suggestions that communicate and spread Living Democracy. She also calls on us to cultivate "bold humility:" Because it's impossible to know what's possible, she writes, we are freed from the struggle to predict outcomes and can engage fully in this rich historical moment. We can expand our hearts to hold two seeming opposites: the evident decline of democracy and the also visible — once we look — signs of life-enhancing practices that cut through surface concerns to address the causal patterns behind our decline.

Chapter One: The Frame – discovering democracy’s power

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter One challenges prevailing wisdom about the core crisis facing our nation. It introduces and defines the concept of “Living Democracy” and shows that the true crisis facing our nation is our feeling of powerlessness to address problems, not a lack of solutions nor a clash of ideologies. In this chapter, we see the difference between the existing “Thin Democracy” and the emergent “Living Democracy,” and how the latter empowers people to engage in the creation of life-serving institutions and communities while the former creates a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Living Democracy means negotiating interests by relying on fair play, honesty, and mutual respect. Democracy respects and builds our capacities to create community, not just to consume things. Solutions depend on *widening the circle of problem solvers* to embrace those most directly affected, as their engagement brings with it at least these three essentials to success:

- The experience and insight of the people closest to the problem
- The creativity that emerges only when diverse perspectives meet
- The commitment to actually “making it happen” that arises when the people involved know that their voices are heard and that they “own” the plan of action

Democracy is not a separate, distant sphere – it is not something done *to us* or *for us* by faraway forces. It is part of the very essence of the good life, fulfilling our deep needs for meaning and community and for meaning in community. We learn that to save the democracy we thought we had, we must take democracy to where it’s never been.

Objectives:

- Ignite critical dialogue about the meaning of democracy
- Grasp the distinction between democracy as a set of fixed institutions and democracy as culture of engagement
- Stir excitement about identifying causal patterns and engaging in the process of creating effective democracy

Questions for discussion:

- What does democracy mean to you? What values do you think are the bedrock of democracy?
- Is democracy working in America – why and/or why not?

- What does the author mean by “Thin Democracy” and “Living Democracy?” [See Handout Number 1.]

Suggested Exercises:

- In small groups, create your own posters and/or handouts with characteristics of “Living” in contrast to “Thin” democracy. Use the Two Frames Handout, material presented in Chapter One, and your own personal experiences.
- Discuss in pairs or small groups personal experiences in which you felt that the government, school system, or other institutions have done things *to you, your loved ones, or your community over which you felt you had no control*. What were the circumstances? How did it feel? What would it have taken to change the situation?

Can you identify situations in which you have taken action, exercised control over a problem, and felt that your voice was heard? If so, was it effective? How and why? How did it feel? What were the circumstances allowing for your participation? What would it take to replicate these circumstances?

Two Frames for Democracy

What is Democracy?

	<i>The Old Frame:</i> A Structure of Government	<i>The New Frame:</i> A Living Practice
What is it?	Democracy is a form of government. It's something we "have." It's a structure -- multiple parties, three branches of government -- that we were lucky enough to have inherited. Ours is complete, its structures unchanging.	Democracy is more than a particular form of government. It is a way of living, an evolving culture of trust grounded in the values of inclusivity and mutuality. We shape its norms and expectations as workers, students, employers, parents, community members and clients, as well as citizens. Living Democracy is something we <i>do</i> . It is never finished.
How does it work?	Ordinary citizens had best let the free market and better-qualified officials and experts make the decisions. Citizens' role is to elect others to solve our problems and to protest if we have to.	The market and government can only function to create strong, healthy communities if guided by the insights and engagement of citizens closest to the problems. Citizens share responsibility for public problem solving.
Who gets involved?	Public life is nasty and alienating. It's for those with thick skins and big egos. Only officials and celebrities have public lives.	We each play public roles and can experience the rewards of engagement as we practice the "arts of democracy" -- active listening, creatively using conflict, negotiation, mediation, mentoring, and so on.
What's the motivation?	Public involvement is a necessary evil to protect our private lives. Getting involved in public affairs is simply a means to an end. It's a way for someone to get what he or she wants.	Public engagement can enrich our private lives. Indeed, it is the only way to fulfill certain deep needs and to develop uniquely human capacities: to connect with others in common purpose, to make a difference in the wider community, to express our values, and to fully respect ourselves.

Chapter Two: The Long Arc – tracing democracy’s journey

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Two reminds us of competing currents in our culture’s history that have taken us to democracy’s edge and points to under-recognized common ground on which we can now walk to move that edge forward.

In one current were forebears who profoundly mistrusted democracy. Today, those carrying forward this mistrust seek to transfer as many decisions as possible from the public realm, where citizens have a voice, to the marketplace, where only money talks. Today that means the transfer of vital democratic functions to corporations – from running our prisons to sponsoring our presidential debates.

This anti-democratic current assumes and builds on a caricature of humanity in which humans are nothing but selfish, calculating schemers in the marketplace. “Greed is good,” we are taught, and advertisers reinforce this simplistic view. From this stance, engaging in democratic deliberation through government is meaningless since human nature inevitably corrupts the process. Therefore, goes the argument, we had better reduce the scope of governmental power, particularly in the marketplace.

Lappé disagrees. In her analysis, market exchange *can* serve human well-being; but if its only driving rule is that of providing highest return to existing shareholders, power inevitably concentrates to the point that it corrupts democratic governance and destroys an open market. Lappé argues that the market serves human freedom in exact proportion to the breadth of the distribution of wealth, and that it takes democratic government to ensure a broad distribution. Thus, an open market and democratic governance are not in opposition; they depend on each other.

What’s more, Lappé continues, movements are alive that not only seek to restore threatened aspects of political democracy but are potentially extending democracy to a new historical stage—a more inclusive, pervasive, vibrant practice in which democratic values infuse all aspects of our culture, from economics to education to the media.

Significant common passions exist among both Democrats and Republicans on a myriad of issues from environment, to health care, to defense spending. Widely shared perceptions about deep, system-wide problems open possibilities for dialogue and unified action among tens of millions of now disaffected Americans. In other words, Living Democracy is possible, and it is happening.

Why is change possible now? The very failures of those at the top may be empowering the rest of us – as their shortcomings demystify authority. Paralleling the demystification of authority at the top is a deepening appreciation of the capacities of those at the “bottom.” This radical shift in perception is so pervasive, and happening on so many levels, that it’s hard to identify it for the revolution it is.

While Thin Democracy, driven by fear and suspicion, appears to be dominant, ripping our society apart as wealth concentrates and fair-opportunity guarantees and civil liberty protections are under attack, this book is primarily about the other dynamic — about real, undeniable signs of Living Democracy emerging. Such democracy is increasingly embraced by citizens who understand that our freedom is possible only in strong communities.

Objectives:

- Understand that the meaning and structures of democracy are not “settled,” but can be seen as competing currents still shaping American society today.

Questions for discussion:

- What antidemocratic trends does Lappé identify? What pro-democracy movements?
- What cultural and technological changes does the author identify that might make Living Democracy’s emergence more possible? What changes does she miss? What cultural changes and forces most work against participation in Living Democracy?
- Do you agree that it is possible for a society to be moving in two opposing directions simultaneously? Why or why not? What pro-democratic and antidemocratic actions and trends do you see or experience?
- How do you think it might change the political climate in the United States if the extent to which “Red” and “Blue” states agree on many issues (e.g the environment and health care) were more widely recognized?

Suggested Exercise:

- *Debate:* part of the class takes the position that citizens are not capable of self government and that decisions are better made in the marketplace. They argue for “getting government off our backs.” The other part of the class argues for activating citizens to shape government’s role in creating fair education, housing, job opportunities, and basic social safety nets. The professor and one or two students can serve as facilitators. The group can determine ground rules before beginning the dialogue.

Chapter Three: Power Is Not a Four-Letter Word – reframing the big ideas that stop us

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Three invites us to discard long-held, stifling assumptions about power, self-interest, and public life, and to embrace liberating alternatives that are already proving effective.

Humans have evolved to function in community and to cooperate. Lappé shows us that once our basic needs are met, acquiring material wealth contributes little to our happiness. More important to happiness are meaningful relationships, a feeling of being truly engaged, and a sense of meaning in life.

To experience fulfillment, we must let go of the notions that we are merely selfish accumulators unable to find joy in common purpose beyond our intimate circles, and that we do not qualify as decision makers. Other false assumptions we can shed are the belief that power is a “thing” controlled by corporations and the government, the idea that getting involved is not worth the trouble and that we do not have time for it, and the thought that others are sure to be apathetic about the issues that most concern us.

Chapter Three argues that in order to find our own power to create the world we want we must rethink public life, power, and self-interest. It provides examples of how Americans are engaging in public problem solving, finding a sense of purpose, and creating real, democratic change.

We come to understand *relational power* – how the growth in one person’s power can enhance the power of others. We see how the power inherent in knowledge, organized numbers, humor, discipline, visioning, and tapping into human compassion are enabling Americans from all walks of life to build power to improve their communities and their lives.

We build power in our daily interactions in schools, businesses, and other institutions that shape us and that are in turn shaped by us. Without denying very real power differences, we can realize that someone has power to create, to block, to enable, or to oppress *only insofar as* other people accept, respond to, or honor that power. Thus we are enabled to find ways to shift the balance and grow our power from within.

Lappé debunks the prevailing wisdom that self interest is the same as selfishness. Our own interests, she argues, are linked to those of others; most people find that helping others makes them feel better both emotionally and physically.

Shedding the disempowering ideas blocking the emergence of effective democracy doesn’t happen simply by deciding to act – though that’s the beginning. Becoming powerful is something we learn, like baseball or ballet. We learn by doing and by

reflecting on our doing. To manifest power means learning as a lifelong journey. We gain power as we hone the arts of engagement, not as an onerous duty, but as a key to the joy of living.

To enjoy and to be effective in the public world we can learn the “arts of democracy,” from active listening to creative conflict. The author provides a downloadable guide to ten arts of democracy on her web site at <http://www.democracysedge.org/arts.php>.

Objectives:

- Examine surface assumptions about the meaning of power, self-interest, and public life today
- Reframe these concepts so that they are empowering for citizens

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé argues that conventional understandings of “public” versus “private” life undervalue citizens’ power in shaping their larger society. Do you agree or disagree that all citizens engage in public life every day?
- What might be the implications, both theoretical and practical, of re-imagining public life as the world not just of officials and celebrities but of “everyday” people?
- What are the first words that come to mind when you hear the word “power?” What does power mean to you? Using Handout #3, ask students how or whether they would add to, subtract from, or modify the author’s ideas about power and relationships.
- Lappé distinguishes among three motives – service, selfishness, and relational self-interest – for engaging in public life. Using Handout #4, ask students to note additional thoughts and feelings that motivate them. Do these distinctions ring true for you? What might most motivate you?
- Why does the author believe that relational self-interest is a more effective motivation than self-interest or selfishness? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Suggested Exercises:

- *Mind Mapping Exercise:* Have students write 3 – 6 words or short phrases that come to mind when they think about “power,” each on a separate post-it note. Students post their notes on the wall. When all notes are posted, two students group similar ideas to create a “mind map” of power for the class. The group can use this as a basis for discussion. An optional take home assignment is for each student

to create a personal “power mind map,” using inspiration from the book and the group exercise.

- Using Handout #2, students circle which roles in public life they already have. Students then choose one or more of these roles and identify some consequences of choices they might make in those roles to shift the status quo. Students discuss in small groups the concept of making conscious choices. In what areas do they make conscious choices? How could making such choices impact their lives and greater society?

Two Ways of Thinking About Power in Public Life

Power Is

Zero-sum. It strengthens some people at the expense of others. It divides what already exists.

A one-way force: either you have it or you don't. It's the powerful versus the powerless.

Limiting, intimidating, and scary.
Controlling.
Rigid, static.
Derived mostly from laws, status, force, and wealth.

All about what I can do or get *now*.

Power Can Be

Mutually expanding. It builds the capacities of all involved. It is creative, involving new sources and new possibilities.

A give-and-take, two-way relationship. No one is ever completely powerless because each person's actions affect others.

Freeing.
Collaborative.
Dynamic, always changing.
Derived from relationships, knowledge, experience, numbers, organization, creativity, vision, perseverance, discipline, and humor.

Concerned with how decisions get made and how power is built *over time*.

Comparing Three Reasons for Entering Public Life

<i>Service</i>	<i>Selfishness</i>	<i>Relational Self-Interest</i>
Reflects the belief “I want to do for others.”	Reflects the belief “I have to look out for myself.”	Reflects the belief “I want to live well and fully in a community that works.”
Is reactive to others (focuses on what others need).	Is reactive to internal needs and unreflective (focuses on what I need).	Is proactive and reflective (focuses on all I care about—family, faith, career, justice, and other important matters).
Is defined by me.	Is defined by me.	Develops from dialogue and interaction with others.
Develops empathy but can foster paternalistic attitudes.	Provides short-term material or other gains.	Develops reflection, empathy, critical thinking, knowledge, and hope.
Sometimes offers recognition.	Sometimes offers visibility.	Offers recognition, visibility, and meaningful relationships.
Can increase self-respect.	Does not increase self-respect.	Increases self-respect and respect from others.
Permits limited creativity; can relieve immediate suffering but sometimes fails to address the roots of that suffering.	Permits limited creativity; shapes communities in ways that often have negative consequences.	Permits unlimited creativity; shapes community life in ways that benefit long-term community health.

Chapter Four: Our Coat – new times, new measures

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Four challenges four misfitting “measures” we’ve inherited – four assumptions that have come to define our economic and political life – and suggests how citizens are remaking these assumptions to fit new realities. We assume, for example, that a free market equals capitalism equals democracy when the meaning and shape of each of these organizing principles are actually still in play, taking new forms to meet new challenges.

Misfit One: Just two political parties – that’s the American way.

Lappé counters with examples. New York’s new third party, the Working Families Party – taking advantage of the state’s “fusion voting” provision – now sometimes provides the victor’s electoral edge. “Instant run-off” voting also is opening the political process to broader representation. These strategies aren’t pie-in-the-sky dreams; they are already offering voters wider choices on Election Day, prying open the two-party lockdown.

Misfit Two: We can’t limit campaign spending – that’s denying free speech.

Despite the many setbacks, innovative citizens are finding ways to remove the power of money in campaigns. “Clean money, clean elections” laws or citizen initiatives have passed in Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, New Mexico, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Vermont. These campaigns are already succeeding in increasing the number of candidates running and voter turn-out. Citizens are pursuing initiatives in over thirty states.

Misfit Three: Leave the market alone! The free market brings us all prosperity.

The free market is a myth. In a market like ours, driven only by highest return to existing wealth (i.e. shareholders), wealth concentrates to the point that it kills an open, fair market. *Thus, the market depends on us – on our acting as citizens to create the conditions for it to work fairly and effectively.* We must establish values “boundaries” around the market to ensure that opportunity, fairness, and freedom are enhanced. Many newly activated citizens are reviving the tradition that sees economic opportunity as being just as essential to our freedom as political rights. In campaigning for “living wages” or to keep corporations out of areas not appropriately distributed by the market, citizens are acting to ensure that the market remains fair and promotes healthy communities.

Misfit Four: To keep generating wealth, corporations must consider only the financial bottom line.

The false gospel that business' sole purpose is to provide the maximum short-term return to shareholders has been discarded. Most Americans want companies to contribute to creating a healthy society. Groups like the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) have made major progress in convincing such mega corporations as Home Depot to reduce environmentally and socially destructive practices.

Examples of citizen engagement outlined in this chapter show us that it is possible to reclaim politics from corporate manipulation, to protect the market from monopoly concentration, and to place market exchange within boundaries respecting community values.

Objectives:

- Reframe four existing assumptions about what is fixed and unchangeable in American economic and political life.
- Reveal underappreciated changes underway replacing these supposed givens of economic and political life with more life-serving assumptions.

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé identifies four common beliefs governing our political and economic life: that a two-party system is essentially unchangeable; that limits on campaign spending should not occur because they would undermine free speech; that an unchecked market is essential to prosperity; and that corporations must focus strictly on their financial bottom lines. Can you identify other governing political and economic assumptions? Does the author convince you that these four assumptions should be challenged?
- Lappé presents examples of citizen challenges to each of these four pervasive cultural beliefs. What is the range of tactics they are using? What do their tactics have in common?
- Which, if any, of the examples of citizens working for democratic change do you think is most important to improving lives in America?

Suggested Exercise:

- In small groups, choose one of the four assumptions outlined in Chapter Four. Write a short informational piece to share with your local community that explains how these assumptions affect our political voice. Steps could include:
 1. Identify the community to be addressed (neighborhood, university campus, local city, region, state, etc.)

2. Choose one of the four common beliefs that Lappé outlines in Chapter Four that you believe is relevant to your community. Explain it in your own words.
3. Identify how this belief may prevent effective Living Democracy from taking place.
4. Identify potential solutions. In what ways are citizens already taking action on these issues locally or in other communities (use examples from the book)?

Chapter Five: The Elephant – corporate power & the shape we give it

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Five zeroes in on the knot at the center of our economic life – the corporation. Corporate power can feel huge and immovable. But even at this epicenter, more is in motion than meets the eye.

Corporations can seem immensely powerful, but what might happen if we were to see the corporation not as an “it” but rather as a pattern of relationships created moment to moment by our own beliefs and behaviors? What could change if we realized that the corporation and the rules of property by which it functions are *of our own making*?

This chapter outlines numerous consequences of the increasing power of corporations (see page 80-81). Public giveaways enrich corporations. Corporations avoid taxes and cause citizens to pay more. Corporations pollute – they account for almost half, not even counting transportation – of United States carbon dioxide emissions. Agribusiness and chemical and petroleum corporations pump trillions of gallons of untreated wastewater, some of it hazardous, each year into eight hundred thousand underground “injection wells” around the country. Corporate profits increase while wages stagnate. We pay much more for our drugs than Europeans do, while drug company profits multiply. Low corporate wages make the public pick up the tab. The country’s largest employer, Wal-Mart, earns profits of \$6.6 billion annually yet pays wages so low that its employees are entitled to \$2.5 billion in public benefits.

Lappé explains how corporations take shape (see “*Five Ways the Elephant Takes Its Shape*” on page 84) and the myths that enable corporations to prosper at the expense of our communities (page 87-88). She further shows us how many citizens groups are already taking successful action to reign in the abuse of corporate power (page 103-105). Organizations and initiatives such as the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), Verité, Social Accountability International, the Fair Labor Association, United Students Against Sweatshops, the Clean Clothes Campaign, the Worker Rights Consortium, and the United Nations’ Global Reporting Initiative are beginning to hold corporations accountable for their actions and provide incentives to act in socially responsible ways.

The Corporation’s Shape Is Changing (page 108)

- One: A movement is under way to rewrite corporate statutes to ensure corporate accountability.
- Two: Corporate rights and protections are being challenged, even in some very unlikely places.

- Three: In many states and localities, citizens are pushing elected bodies to set additional values boundaries around the actions of corporations.
- Four: Shareholders are joining together to exert real influence on corporate behavior, as Chapter Six explores.
- Five: New expectations are emerging that corporations should be accountable for the consequences of their acts, and some are responding.

A corporation is a set of relationships that powerfully determine the well-being of our community. These relationships take their shape from at least five directions — corporate statutes, the courts, laws and conventions, shareholders, and the intangible but powerful norms created by our self-set, self-monitored actions, expectations, and standards.

Objectives:

- Demystify the corporation by reviewing the history and nature of corporations
- Relate the corporation to our understanding of democracy
- Examine alternative definitions of the corporation and ways Americans are working to apply democratic values to its structure and functioning

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé argues that corporations, while conceived of as private entities, in fact wield tremendous public power over our livelihoods, health, and environment. Given her analysis, and in your opinion, to what extent should large corporations be considered public?
- Lappé argues that corporations are not fixed but are being shaped by five forces — ranging from state charters to citizen-determined community norms. Do you think your daily choices affect corporate actions? If so, which choices, and how?
- Lappé uses the term “values boundaries” to describe the rules that democratic bodies enact to guide and set standards for corporate behavior. What tactics are citizens using to raise those standards of corporate practice? How are these tactics similar to or different from the citizen tactics used in Chapter Four to challenge pervasive political and economic myths?

Suggested Exercise:

- Choose a corporation that uses practices that you believe violate human rights or sound environmental standards. (Take an example from the book or one you find out about through research.) Draft a letter to the company explaining how its choices impact communities. Offer suggestions of alternatives to these practices and provide examples, if possible, of other companies that have successfully changed their policies.

Chapter Six: Attention – economics & everyday life

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Six, “Attention,” focuses on the emergence of local living economies where citizens are paying attention to the power that can be theirs in everyday economic choices.

We see that economics is about real human connections. It is about relationships. Money and corporations are primarily ways of organizing our relationships with each other and only secondarily about things. And those relationships of economic life we take for granted today in America – where just five corporations, for example, control over four out of ten of all grocery purchases and corporate branding covers everything from stadiums to socks – are brand new.

Corporations are the result of choices. They are not static entities; the question is not whether they will change, but how they will change. Lappé highlights the underappreciated power of choices we make every day in our many economic roles. We are at consumers, workers, voters influencing economic policy via elected representatives, investors, owners, employers, and, sometimes, direct shapers of economic policy (page 113-115).

Globalization can be a misleading term. Corporate globalization distances real people from other real people on whom we are dependent. A sense of common interest and natural human solidarity is harder to come by. It encourages us to forget the questions of who has the power and who benefits in our economic relationships. We become dependent on entities with the power to make decisions drastically affecting our lives even as our power to influence those decisions erodes.

Living Democracy emerges as more and more of us pay attention, as we enjoy our power to choose – whether it be as “power shoppers” for goods produced by workers whose dignity is respected, as savers aware that where we put a nest egg influences the health of our community, as pension fund stewards turning our “passive” power into an active force bending corporate decisions toward long-term planetary health, or as investors in community development banks.

We can create local, living economies by choosing to buy locally produced goods. We can cut out middlemen, create more direct contact between producers and consumers, focus on our values (and not only on highest financial return,) and increase cultural variety (page 130-131). Community banking initiatives prove that it is possible to make a profit while democratizing credit, providing fair employment opportunities, and investing in socially responsible initiatives. “Local first” and “local lucre” campaigns are gaining momentum across the country. Locally owned, community owned, and worker owned businesses are successfully competing with chain-operated companies.

Most people want a stronger sense of rootedness to place and neighbor; they want to protect and restore the natural world. They want every worker, including themselves, to be paid fairly and treated with respect. We do not have to accept the inevitability of corporate power or the “law of the market.” As we pay attention to our daily economic choices — as purchasers, savers, borrowers, owners, workers — we feel our power growing.

Objectives:

- Rethink economics as being about “relationships” rather than “things.”
- Perceive and understand the emergence of “living local economies” through deliberate consumer choices.
- Grasp some reasons why globalizing corporate power is not inevitable or desirable.
- See possibilities for enriching one’s own life through greater attention to the ripples created by economic choices.

Questions for discussion:

- Why does the author think it’s important to shift our perception of economics from being simply about “things” to being embedded in “relationships?” How might our choices be different if we think of economics as a network of relationships?
- Lappé identifies “power shopping,” local purchasing, corporate shareholder votes, and community-directed banking as means to create more healthful, sustainable living economies. What challenges and rewards might one face in undertaking these practices?
- Is there one new choice you might consider making as a result of the perspective this chapter presents? How would you expect to feel by taking this action?

Suggested Exercise:

- Do a self-assessment. How much of your purchasing takes place at local businesses? How often do you consider (if at all) whether a business is local when making purchases? Discuss with the class. As a group, brainstorm a list of local businesses frequented by class members.

Chapter Seven: Action – politics & the inauguration of the citizen

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Seven tells the story of how the coordinated actions of citizens are making significant differences. Many ordinary Americans are stepping out for the first time to bring about historic shifts in who makes decisions governing our well-being and happiness – from fair wages to affordable homes to reasonable lending rates – even as official channels narrow for citizens’ voices in shaping public policies.

Regular citizens, many connected through religious congregations and union locals, have jump-started a breakthrough in democracy itself. This Chapter highlights several astounding stories of groups such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), its affiliates such as Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) and Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), ACORN, and others.

These citizen-driven successes are telling us that democracy is not a “thing” we have, something done to us or for us. Democracy is *what we do* – something rewarding because it meets our deep needs and capacities for connection with each other and effectiveness in the larger world. As Martha McCoy says, “If people know their voice will be heard, they will be there” (page 154).

Lappé also explains some of the key tactics that reshape the way ordinary people engage in democracy and enable the remarkable successes outlined in this chapter (See “Citizen Power 101, page 161).

Objectives:

- Reveal the wide range of largely invisible contemporary citizens’ movements – working both inside and outside official channels.
- Suggest lessons they are learning and some reasons for their efficacy.
- Emphasize how even small, unlikely beginnings can build quickly to bring about significant change.

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé argues that citizens are learning to go beyond protest to problem solving. What forms of “relational power” discussed in Chapter 4 are citizens using here to advance their goals?
- What challenges do citizens face in trying to build power? If power is not necessarily zero-sum – the more for you, the less for me – how might the actions of citizens in these examples expand power overall?
- Lappé presents multiple examples of grassroots citizens’ groups creating new power across cultural, economic, and educational

lines. What tactics are citizens using, and how do they compare with the citizens' tactics mentioned in previous chapters?

- What might be the advantages or disadvantages of working for democratic changes inside electoral politics and official government channels versus outside?

Suggested Exercise:

- In small groups, discuss local actions you have participated in or know about. Do you think they have been effective? Why or why not? In what ways might they have affected the power of individuals or groups involved? Do they use any of the tactics Lappé describes?

Chapter Eight: Choice – the myth of choice & the taste of democracy

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Eight, "Choice," ploughs into the myths surrounding the food we eat and explores movements that are multiplying our choices by reconnecting farmers, eaters, and a healthier earth.

Lappé unveils how the illusion of choice is created by multiple brands filling supermarkets and masking the narrowing corporate control of our planet's food supply. American consumers are drowning in products but robbed of choice (see sidebar: "Five Ways We're Robbed of Choice" page 186). The many hidden costs of such a major historical shift in food production, distribution, and consumption as we have seen in the past century are highlighted (see sidebar: "Are We 'Choosing' This?" page 198-199).

At the same time, Americans are re-knitting ties to the earth and rediscovering the love of healthy food. They are re-creating local food economies and reducing energy use by cutting transport distances. Farmers are rethinking blind adherence to the chemical path and embracing ecological practices. Co-operative ventures are proving viable and returning profit to farmers and local communities. With their allies, they are igniting public concern about an agribusiness subsidy system gone terribly awry and bonding together to sell and process their own crops.

Urban communities, rich and poor, are creating their own gardens and linking consumers and farmers. Farm-to-school programs are flourishing, with schools adding their own gardens for hands-on learning. To confront the obesity epidemic others are making healthy food an attractive and practical option and restoring mealtime to its place at the center of satisfying social life.

In all the initiatives, citizens are expanding real choice as they send ripples out through their actions to reverse trends that have made our food one of society's greatest health hazards.

Objectives:

- Reframe the core assumption that U.S. food production and consumption result from our free "choice."
- Show that our current food system's dangers flow from the anti-democratic concentration of decision making within a shrinking number of corporations.
- Explode the myth that healthy food is possible only for the better-off.
- Examine healthier, more satisfying, more viable food production and consumption choices.

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé examines five ways in which citizens are deprived of real food and farming choices. Do you feel it is easy to choose a healthy diet? What would make it easier?
- Do you agree our food and farming system is damaging the earth and our health? If not, why not? If so, what do you think are solutions?
- What does Lappé mean when she talks about conscious consumer choices?
- In this chapter, what tactics are citizens using to reclaim choice?
- Is there one food choice you might change as a result of the information here?

Suggested Exercise:

- Draw food maps for various products. Can you guess where it is grown, produced, transported, and where it may go before being consumed by you? How many stages can you think of for various products (produce; coffee; processed or packaged food)? How do the maps for local food and corporate brokered food look different? What do you know (and what would you like to know) about the working conditions of the various people involved in producing food?

Chapter Nine: Voice – the debasement of the media & the sound of democracy

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Nine argues that democracy is in essence about voice: it is not only about who can speak but also about who gets heard and about our right and need to hear many diverse voices. The shift to viewing media as a mere commodity underlies and enables the disturbing erosion of democracy brought to light throughout this book. The chapter explores who can speak and who can be heard in America. Lappé tackles the myth that we are to blame for our debased media and illustrates how Americans are connecting with each other and with their passion for honest public talk.

The media has become another consumer product within a multi-billion dollar industry whereas they were once considered a pillar of society equal to government. As what is deemed news is increasingly reduced to a commercial decision, Americans have become shockingly uninformed about matters vital to their well being.

Americans believe that because we do not have government censorship we have a free press. Yet the public's protection from biased media has been steadily declining since the 1980's as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been chipping away at policies and regulations designed to protect access to information (page 225-227). Lappé debunks the myth that media simply responds to the interests of the public (page 227-228) and shows the pitfalls of basing media coverage on highest monetary return (page 228-230). It is not enough to be *free from censorship* in the modern era, we have a *positive* right to balanced and informative media.

Media democracy movements are bringing together a diverse array of citizens and showing us that even in this era of corporate consolidation, we can become media makers ourselves and challenge the rules that govern it. Modern technology in the form of the internet, email, and digital streaming is bringing down the cost of providing high quality news and allowing not-profit-motivated individuals and groups to reach large numbers of people. Bypassing the corporate stranglehold on information, bloggers, internet sites, low power radio stations and local television stations, and documentary film makers are exploding in number and impact.

In this Chapter, Lappé chronicles the stories of pioneers like the Guerilla News Network (GNN.tv), Democracy Now!, and the Prometheus Radio Project (for a sample of such initiatives and their successes, see pages 243-245). Millions of Americans are beginning to see their connected fate and the media as a critical link to their public world – one with the potential to either expand or deny their power.

By no means have all Americans given up on their core commitment to the media as a public good. And new media technology is cracking open the conversation by enabling citizens to bypass debased media and connect directly with each other. It is arming

citizens with tools to better hold authorities accountable, and it is allowing more people to create media themselves (page 248).

Objectives:

- Reframe prevailing assumptions about the link between the media and democracy.
- Examine ways citizens are reclaiming media for more democratic access and making the media a vehicle for citizen voices and diverse cultural expression.
- Explore citizen pressure on government bodies set up to create fair rules governing media ownership and access.

Questions for discussion:

- Do you think today's media serve American society well?
- What problems does Lippé identify within the American media structure?
- How are citizens confronting the concentration of power within the media?
- How are citizens working to broaden citizens' capacities to express their views through a range of media and gain access to a wider range of views?

Suggested Exercise:

- Ask students to read, on the same day, the top stories on the websites of
 - 1) Two alternative news sites in the U.S.
 - 2) Two corporate-owned newspapers in the U.S
 - 3) Newspapers in two other countries.

Ask that they come to class prepared to share their analysis as to why certain items appeared some places and not in others, as well as their reflections on differing interpretations of the same events. Discuss the implications for democracy of their findings.

Chapter Ten: Learning – sharing power & apprenticing democracy

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Ten vividly illustrates how a love of learning lies at the heart of a democratic culture and explains how our schools do not create an educated and engaged citizenry.

Our current system is in crisis (see page 252-253). Our students lag behind when compared to industrial nations across the globe, graduation rates are low, spending is high and unfairly weighted toward wealthier districts, students' ethics are eroding, schools are unsafe, and buildings are decrepit. We hear calls for our schools to do the same old things they have always done, only *better*. But if our educational system stays on this track, we are doomed. More, or even better, is not enough. The world has changed radically since our industrial assembly-line model of schooling took hold more than a century ago. The standardized testing system, as it currently operates, stifles experimentation and the "No Child Left Behind" legislation punishes underfunded schools for not meeting national standards without supporting effective solutions.

Lappé advocates an alternative approach that works: education engendering the attitudes and capacities in citizens that democracy must enjoy in order to thrive. She argues that educating for democracy and effective education are one and the same. Lappé shows how successful innovation is under way through at least a half dozen networks in the world of public schools, remaking more than six hundred schools nationwide.

Educating for democracy starts with creating a culture of connection – among subjects students study, real world change, and relationships between students, teachers, and the community. With this in mind, Lappé shares six lessons learned from effective schools (page 257):

1. Scale matters. Keep it small.
2. Make time for each other and for in-depth study.
3. Pursue meaningful questions (page 261).
4. Encourage student-initiated, hands-on projects and demonstrations.
5. Foster self-assessment, charting one's own development.
6. Share authority and teach democracy by practicing its arts.

Other key ideas in this chapter include the importance of using conflict constructively, engaging in community problem-solving, and the value of collaboration, respect, solidarity, and community. Only through practicing and learning the skills and experiencing the real life situations challenging our communities do students learn to be active, effective, and engaged citizens.

Objectives:

- Reframe existing assumptions about the crisis in American education and solutions.
- Draw connections between effective schooling and democratic schooling.
- Examine the key elements of learning models that are succeeding.
- Ignite a sense of possibility – that we do know what works and it is within our reach.

Questions for discussion:

- Lappé identifies six core ways in which our public schools are failing to meet students' and society's needs. What might be the assumptions about the role and purpose of education that have led to these problems?
- How are educators reframing their curricula and organizing schools to make them more effective?
- Lappé argues that democratic education and good education are one and the same. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Why might these approaches be more effective? Would they likely work for you, and why or why not?
- The author includes "essential questions" that have helped students pursue learning in ways useful to them. Are these questions useful to you? Are there other lessons in this chapter that you can apply to your educational experience?

Suggested Exercise:

- Design a workshop to share ideas from this book (recommendation: choose one chapter or example) with other students using ideas from this chapter about learning. How might you make it interactive? What strategies might you use to engage people with the "essential questions?"

Chapter Eleven: Security – the exclusion illusion & the power of connection

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Eleven pierces through the fear and shame that underlie American culture. With examples, facts, and straightforward explanations, Lappé shows us that the security so essential to our freedom and happiness is possible only if we build inclusive communities and commit to addressing the root causes of our problems, from racism to poverty to abusive prisons, and escape from the cycles of fear and shame created by punishing violence using violence.

Psychologists might well diagnose our culture as one “in denial,” stubbornly blind to the ways in which we needlessly provoke the violence we fear. Unable to name that fear, we pin it on sources presented – crime we see on the evening news, terrorists that could strike at any second. We seek protection by violent means if necessary and by banishing offenders. We buy more guns (now one in every four of us has one) and security systems and we build more prisons.

Incarceration rates are up, costs of imprisonment are rising, recidivism rates are astronomical, and the toll on families is immeasurable. Our culture of fear, and the banishment approach to crime it inspires, ends up generating the very crime that so frightens us.

To the shaming culture in the outside world, U.S. prisons add shaming treatment on the inside. Imprisonment has hit an all-time high. Yet harsher treatment is not proving more effective, either in making us feel safer or in changing criminal behavior.

Our society increasingly traps those at the bottom on a treadmill of deadening schools, poverty-wage jobs, and hardscrabble neighborhoods. All are insults to self-regard. Adding to the humiliations of poverty itself is America’s persistent Horatio Alger myth, the bootstrap notion that anyone with spunk can lift oneself out of the hole. In reality, social mobility – lower-income people climbing to society’s higher rungs – is not the reality for millions of Americans.

Seeing low wages, joblessness, and homelessness as potent stimuli of shame and therefore key to the politics of violence helps us understand why the United States, with a much larger share of people living in poverty compared to other wealthy countries, also suffers the highest rates of violent crime. Moreover, given that it is one’s sense of inferior status relative to others that engenders shame, it is not surprising that the “most powerful predictor” of a society’s murder rate is “the size of the disparities in income and wealth” and that among advanced industrial nations, the United States suffers the most unequal income spread.

We can hold transgressors accountable for the harm they have done and require restitution where possible without severing their community ties and further shaming them. We can resist the temptation to expel and instead engage.

What works are efforts addressing the two emotions at the root of our growing pain: fear and shame. The antidote to fear is trust. Security grows from a culture of connection based on mutual respect and accountability, including the engagement of those most affected. Solutions for our society are emerging as citizens are fostering a culture of inclusion. Across the political spectrum, a multilayered movement is taking shape that builds on the key insights of Living Democracy.

*Seeing Through the Exclusion Illusion:
Five Ways Americans Are Creating Security*

- Enabling prisoners to rebuild self-respect and to find a contributing place for themselves in communities.
- Reknitting communities as citizens take on responsibility for safety and become partners with police.
- Enabling nonviolent offenders to avoid prison and make amends to their victims and the community.
- Spreading practices that resolve minor breaches and disputes *before* they escalate into crime.
- Strengthening community connections — including economic exchanges — that enhance mutual respect, trust, and support and therefore our feelings of safety.

Chapter Eleven outlines numerous citizen's movements that are making headway in reversing these trends. MAD DADs (Men Against Destruction-Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder), Community Reparative Boards, skills training opportunities, and teen courts are a few of the solutions being implemented by communities throughout the U.S. Americans are establishing relationships of trust and caring through mediation projects, time sharing programs that value people's time equally and help establish relationships of mutual support, and conversation cafés that bring people face to face to discuss relevant issues.

Tens of thousands of citizens are taking action to address the consequences of living in a culture of fear and shame. They have recognized that our individual and collective actions matter and they are emerging as citizens who are fostering a culture of inclusion.

Objectives:

- Challenge the existing assumption that shaming and isolating offenders works to enhance our security.

- Demonstrate how approaches that enhance offenders' capacities and self-respect are more effective and cost effective than our current system.
- Open readers to the possibility that creating strong community ties and enhanced *general* well-being is essential to *individual* security.

Questions for discussion:

- The author describes a vicious cycle of violence and crime. What is this cycle and what feeds it?
- Why do you think there are such great differences in crime rates among societies?
- In Lappé's examples of citizens effectively partnering with law enforcement, which do you think hold the most promise to create trust, justice and security? Why?

Suggested Exercise

- Recall examples from your own past when you (or someone you know) was punished or reprimanded for something. Can you think of a time that you felt shamed by the punishment? How did it feel? How did it change your actions? Can you think of another instance in which you realized you had made a mistake or could act differently in the future without being punished for what you did? What were the circumstances? How did you come to realize your mistake? Spend 10-15 minutes freewriting on the question of whether punishment is the most effective way of dealing with people who break the rules. What other ways might be more effective?

Chapter Twelve: The Invitation – finding ourselves in democracy’s walk

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter Twelve reminds us that our simple and false ideas about capitalism and democracy are not working. Solutions require that we believe in ourselves. This book shows us that we can choose Living Democracy. We can choose to eliminate money’s corrupting grip on our electoral process. Citizens can and many are infusing their voices, and with them principles of mutual accountability, in all dimensions of public life, from our schools and workplaces to the media and the marketplace.

Encouraged to see ourselves as isolated, materialistic and competitive, *of course* we want to believe in a market that works automatically, one requiring nothing from us but working and shopping! Caught in this caricature of our nature, we assume we are incapable of creating a fairer, more democratic economy. And we come to accept an equally false idea about democracy itself: that it can meet today’s challenges while understood as simply a particular structure of government, working on its own, without us.

Human beings are social creatures who crave connection; we thrive best in trusting communities and we yearn for transcendent meaning. Living Democracy is rich enough to satisfy a big part of that yearning: for it is a vision of connectedness to each other and of work larger than ourselves.

Americans across the country are cutting through the false messages to claim their fuller selves. They are discarding the outdated, disproved notion that engagement is only for officials and experts. They are insisting that without us there are no solutions. Only we citizens, for example, can put “values boundaries” around the market to protect that which has inherent value, not just market value: our health and the health of our communities. Monopoly is no game. It is what markets do without citizens who are awake and engaged. So even when it comes to distributing commodities, a competitive, freedom-serving marketplace depends on us to keep wealth widely dispersed so all citizens can participate.

Humans are hardwired through eons of evolutionary experience to sense that our survival depends on staying on the “inside” – with the tribe. We thrive on the approval of others; we dread humiliation above all else. So it is hard for human beings to say, “No, the whole pack is heading toward catastrophe!” We fear being cast out. So we hold back.

Yet our dominant tribe *is* about to paddle over Victoria Falls – as we melt ice caps, obliterate species, pollute the air, speed wealth’s concentration, and build ever more weapons of mass destruction. Thus, it could well be that unless humans are able to work creatively with fear we *are* doomed. To create the world we want we need to

consciously create a new, powerful frame — a vision of democracy as a living practice — and to choose words that evoke it.

Finally, a lesson of this book is humility. We do not know what the future will bring. It is not possible to know what is possible. That is humility. And because this is true, we are free. We are free to act assuming that our action — no matter how “small” it appears to us — could be the tipping point setting off tectonic shifts of consciousness and creativity.

In this spirit of bold humility, this book asks us to pay attention. To consciously let go of defeating and false messages telling us that, “it’s all over” or that “there’s no place for us in this great human drama.” It asks us to admit that we can not judge our chances of success, but we can learn to see the richness that’s been made invisible to us and then to make it visible . . . so that its ripples radiate.

Most of all, this book proves that not one of us is alone as we set out on the exhilarating *experience of democracy* — this satisfying and very human walk in which we go on risking belief in ourselves.

Objectives:

- Remind readers of the urgency of the challenge of moving from Thin Democracy to Living Democracy.
- Motivate readers with a sense of possibility and a framework for seeing one’s own life as part of an exciting, historical change.

Questions for discussion:

- What examples of Living Democracy have you encountered in your own life?
- What does Lappé mean when she writes that it is “not possible to know what’s possible,” and why is that realization important to her?
- What do you think stops people from choosing to be part of creating the Living Democracy Lappé describes? What is the role of fear? During the debate she describes, do you think Lappé should have stood up to protest the political ad she thought was unprincipled, even if it caused embarrassment among many? How does the author suggest we rethink fear?
- Considering all of the examples in the book, which most surprised you? Which seemed the most promising avenues to increase citizen power in democratizing our society?

Suggested Exercise:

- As a class, brainstorm ideas of actions you might take to enhance your own power and express your voice on something about which you feel strongly. As a take home assignment, each student takes one action, however small, and writes a short reflective paper on the experience. As an alternative, the students could write about one action they could have taken, but did not. What prevented them from taking the action? How might it have felt if s/he had done so?