

# 250 &

## BEYOND

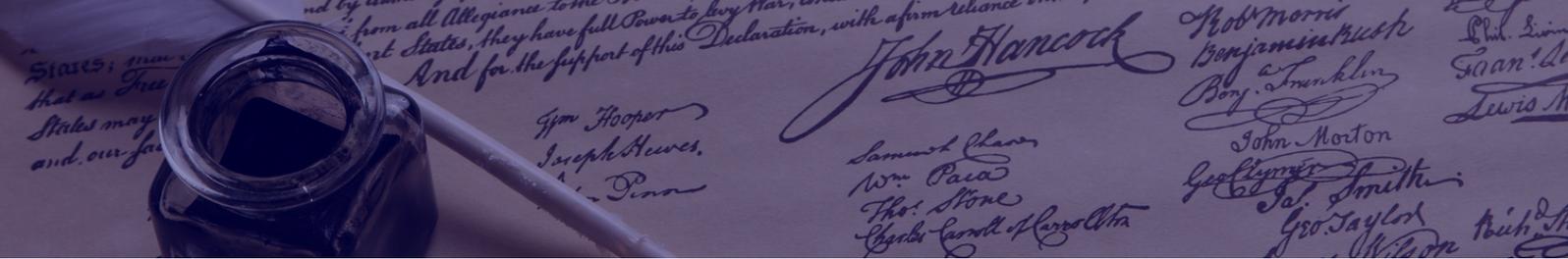
### Our American Story

A conversation about communities,  
service and democracy.

# ENGAGEMENT and DISCUSSION GUIDE

NATIONAL MUSEUM  
AND CENTER FOR  
SERVICE



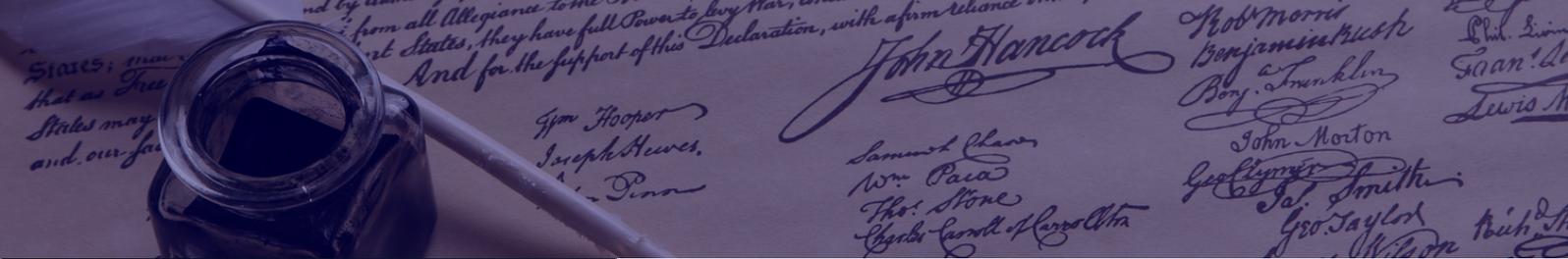


## Using the guide

The goal of this guide is to help facilitate deeper conversations around 250 & Beyond: Our American Story, exploring essential themes such as the unifying spirit of civic service, the founding ideals of our constitutional democracy, the role of Congress, and the ongoing tension between self-interest and the common good. This guide will help you engage your community in thoughtful activities and discussions, including school assemblies, classroom conversations, and local town halls. Whether you are hosting a private screening of the video panel, a single classroom discussion, or a large public event in partnership with your local library or broadcast station, we hope that this guide prepares you to spark meaningful connections around the history of the United States. Together, we can make service visible and valued, celebrate everyday heroes, and inspire the next generation of citizens as we look toward our nation's 250th anniversary and beyond.

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## How to watch

Available Monday, March 9, 2026

YouTube - Visit

[www.250andbeyond.com/conversation](http://www.250andbeyond.com/conversation)

## Social

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/nmcfs](http://www.facebook.com/nmcfs)

BlueSky: [bsky.app/profile/nmcfs.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/nmcfs.bsky.social)

YouTube: [www.youtube.com/@nmcfservice](http://www.youtube.com/@nmcfservice)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/nmcfs](http://www.linkedin.com/company/nmcfs)

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/nmcfservice/](http://www.instagram.com/nmcfservice/)

#250andbeyond, #NMCFS, #OurAmericanStory

## About the program

250 & Beyond: Our American Story examines how we think about America's founding and how the ideas and values of civic duty articulated 250 years ago remain relevant to conversations about governance and community today.

Presented by the National Museum and Center for Service in partnership with WETA, the special features host and former U.S. Representative Brian Baird in conversation with Sarah Botstein, acclaimed documentary filmmaker of *THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, alongside former U.S. Representatives Bob Inglis, Donna Edwards, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

This special engages Americans through a renewed civic conversation rooted in the founding principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, exploring essential themes of democracy, the critical role of Congress, balancing self-interest with the common good, and the unifying power of service.

The special features excerpts from *THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, the 12-hour documentary series that examines how America's founding turned the world upside-down. Thirteen British colonies on the Atlantic Coast rose in rebellion, won their independence, and established a new form of government that radically reshaped the continent and inspired centuries of democratic movements around the globe.



# MEET THE PANELISTS



**HON. BRIAN BAIRD**

**FORMER REPRESENTATIVE (DEM), WASHINGTON STATE & FOUNDER, NATIONAL MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR SERVICE**

Brian served for twelve years in the United States House of Representatives (WA-3, 1999-2011). Brian holds a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the University of Wyoming, practiced clinically for twenty years, has written three books, served as a university president, and was an advisor to the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.



**SARAH BOTSTEIN, DIRECTOR/PRODUCER  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

Sarah Botstein has produced some of the most popular and acclaimed documentaries on PBS. She recently produced and co-directed THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION along with Ken Burns and David Schmidt. Her previous work includes JAZZ, THE WAR, PROHIBITION, THE VIETNAM WAR, COLLEGE BEHIND BARS, and HEMINGWAY. THE U.S. AND THE HOLOCAUST marked Botstein's debut as a co-director.



**HON. DONNA F. EDWARDS**

**FORMER REPRESENTATIVE (DEM), MARYLAND**

The first African American woman to represent Maryland. A Wake Forest and UNH Law graduate, she co-founded the National Network to End Domestic Violence, helping pass the Violence Against Women Act. She previously worked as a systems engineer at Lockheed for NASA. In Congress, she championed Science, Space and Technology.



**HON. BOB INGLIS**

**FORMER REPRESENTATIVE (REP), SOUTH CAROLINA**

Following his time in Congress, he committed to promoting free enterprise solutions for climate change. He launched the Energy and Enterprise Initiative, which later became republicEn.org. His efforts earned him the 2015 John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award.



**HON. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**

**FORMER REPRESENTATIVE (REP), FLORIDA**

A native of Cuba, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen served for almost three decades. As the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress, she chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee, championed freedom and democracy, and fought for LGBT equality, leading on acts like the Respect for Marriage Act.

# SETTING UP A SCREENING & LOCAL EVENT

The nation's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a great time to bring community together through a shared value. Consider hosting a screening of the video conversation and/or hosting a similar style Q&A in your school or community.

Use *250 & Beyond: Our American Story* as an opportunity to build new or strengthen existing relationships, and to celebrate America's semiquincentennial with meaningful dialogue around the American spirit of service in our past, present, and future.

In addition to relationships you may already have, partners can be relied on as experts to inform your activities and events, help facilitate this dialogue, and assist in gathering local "Stories of Service" or building a local Museum of Service exhibition. Begin your partnership outreach by connecting with your local public media station, youth organizations, museums, historical societies, public libraries, local humanities organizations, universities and colleges, and civic groups.

## Facilitation tips

**Finding a great host:** If you are hosting a large school assembly or event that includes a screening of the program, your own panel discussion, or town hall, recruit a host or moderator who can facilitate an interesting discussion, draw out answers from the participants that are suitable for the audience, and keep your students and audience engaged. The role of the host is to keep the discussion moving while remaining neutral.

Your host need not be an expert in the field, but rather someone who can facilitate discussion and create a safe environment where all participants feel free to speak their thoughts and pose questions. A good host should plan on previewing the screener in advance to prepare. Journalists and local reporters can make for excellent moderators and help keep the conversation on track. Local public media stations are excellent resources for unbiased journalists and reporters.

**Share questions in advance:** If you are hosting a panel or bringing in local experts, share the discussion questions with your panelists and speakers well ahead of time. This allows them to prepare thoughtful answers, particularly for questions that require historical background or specific expertise

# SETTING UP A SCREENING & LOCAL EVENT

## Facilitation tips

**Invite local media:** Reach out to local newspapers, public radio, and community access television. Invite them not only as a “coverage opportunity” but to partner in telling the story of service in your community as part of a nationwide movement with 250 & Beyond.

**Commit to action:** Wrap up the discussion by asking participants to commit to a specific act of service they will take in the community. You can solidify this by having the group document their actions on a shared pledge that is displayed somewhere visible to the community.

**Selecting panelists:** Recruit local experts and invite them to participate in a panel discussion or Q&A about the program and that are particularly relevant to your community. It is critical for this topic to include a diverse range of speakers and youth voices to ensure representation of your community.

For a robust community conversation, bring in diverse, bi-partisan voices from local and regional government, and community leaders. Just as the 250 & Beyond: Our American Story video features a mix of former Democratic and Republican representatives sharing their shared values, a local panel with diverse political backgrounds can powerfully demonstrate how service unifies us. Current and former elected officials—such as your mayor, city or county council members, state legislators, and former members of Congress—can provide invaluable perspectives on the realities of public service, the role of government, and the balance between constituent demands and the common good.

**Inviting a Former Member of Congress:** If you’re interested in bringing Former Members to your event, you can reach out to the Association of Former Members of Congress (FMC) at [www.usafmc.org/contact-us](http://www.usafmc.org/contact-us) for assistance. In your email, please include when and where the event is being held, as well as a description of the event or panel you’d like a Former Member to participate in. FMC will forward your request to Former Members of Congress who may be interested and confirm them based on availability. FMC does not share contact information for any of its Members without first obtaining their permission. Please keep in mind Former Members of Congress donate their time pro-bono, and FMC cannot guarantee a Former Member will be available to participate.





# SETTING UP A SCREENING & LOCAL EVENT

## Event ideas

### The civic leadership town hall

Event description: Screen the introductory conversation between Brian Baird and Sarah Botstein discussing the Founders' focus on the legislative branch and the importance of virtue and the "common good". Invite local and regional politicians, such as the mayor, city council members or state representatives for a live Q&A. Ask them to reflect on former Rep. Bob Inglis's quote that "to deserve the seat, you have to be willing to lose the seat." Discuss the challenges of balancing constituent demands with the "common good" and how local government can foster a culture of service.

### The hidden connectors

Event description: Screen the segment where the panelists define service (e.g., Brian Baird calling it the "hidden connector," Bob Inglis's story of the river rescue, or Donna Edwards's RV trip discoveries). Invite local volunteer organizations, first responders, teachers, journalists and others who do good to participate in a "Moth-style" storytelling event. Pre-select 3-5 people to kick off the storytelling, with a live, oral, true, first person narrative about 5 minutes long. Once the conversation gets started, invite others in the audience to come up on stage and participate with their own story.

### The volunteer fair

Event description: Host a screening of the video conversation, and invite local community based organizations to set up tables for a 250 & Beyond volunteer fair. Add a Wish Wall to the space and invite people to participate in creating a vision for your community's future. More information on Wish Walls is available at [www.thecivicseason.com/wish-walls](http://www.thecivicseason.com/wish-walls).

# SETTING UP A SCREENING & LOCAL EVENT

## Event ideas

### Youth and the spirit of service

Event description: Empower young people by showing them that their voices have historically driven change and that they have a role in the next 250 years. Utilize the Service and the Role of Young People discussion guide and screen the full panel, focusing particularly on Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's quote from MLK: "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve." Host a panel of young local leaders to discuss the barriers to involvement for youth today, and how communities can help bridge those barriers.

### Launching a local Museum of Service

Event description: Use the screening as a kickoff event to build a lasting legacy project for America's semiquincentennial. Following the video, host a brainstorming workshop on how to create a physical local Museum of Service in your town. Discuss where to host it (the library, a school hallway, city hall) and form an "250 & Beyond Committee" to lead the project, gathering photos, artifacts, and stories of local service. Think through the skills your local community has, and how you can create a lasting legacy.



John Lewis High School in Fairfax, VA's Campus Museum of Service



YMCA of Metropolitan Washington staff in front of their Community Museum of Service at DC Public Library, Martin Luther King Jr. branch



John Marks, VP Research & Engagement, American Association for State and Local History in a panel discussion at the National Service Symposium, 2024.

# SETTING UP A SCREENING & LOCAL EVENT

## PANEL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below you'll find a variety of suggested questions that can be used to host your own 250 & Beyond: Our American Story discussion panel. Add your own, modify and tailor questions for particular speakers, drawing from their background and interests.

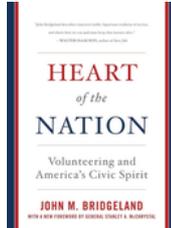
- At the closing of the Declaration of Independence, the signers pledged their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" for the greater good. How does that profound level of personal risk and commitment compare to our modern understanding of public service and the duties of citizens today?
- The "pursuit of happiness" was originally understood by the Founders not as mere hedonism, but as the pursuit of virtue and the common good. How can we reclaim this idea of prioritizing the community's well-being in a political climate that is so often driven by self-interest.
- The Constitution and the idea of a constitutional democratic republic hinge on people coming together for the common good, not just self-interest. Many people have recognized that when we are at our best, America has been an example and leader in service. How have you seen that play out and how should that guide us into the next 250 years?
- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . . ." How do you think that word has been interpreted over the past 250 years? How do you interpret that word now?
- The Founders purposefully included an amendment process within the Constitution, acknowledging that the document would need to evolve. How has this specific power to amend served as an essential tool for future generations to challenge the initial limits of our founding documents and expand the American narrative to include all people?
- Throughout our history, groups who were initially excluded from the full rights of citizenship—including women, enslaved peoples, and Indigenous peoples—nevertheless served the developing nation in vital ways. How did the civic action and ongoing service of these marginalized groups help drive the amendment process, proving that our nation grows stronger as "We the People" expands to include everyone?
- During the American Revolution, many leaders and activists were teenagers or in their early twenties. What are the biggest barriers preventing young people from getting involved in local service or running for office today, and how do we remove them?
- Service has been described as the "hidden connector" that keeps our communities running—from volunteer coaches to local first responders. From your perspectives, how can we make these everyday acts of civic virtue more visible and valued in our society?
- How can engaging in local, shared service projects help bridge the partisan divides we see in national headlines?
- What lessons about serving others in our nation's history—relevant to leaders and everyday citizens—can guide us today, at 250 years and as we look to the next 250 years?
- What is one specific action or "legacy project" you would challenge communities to take in their own towns to ensure the American experiment thrives for the next 250 years?

# RELATED READING

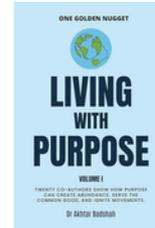
Reading is a great way to learn more about this topic. Here is a list of books to continue diving into our nation's founding, the role of service in our democracy and communities today.



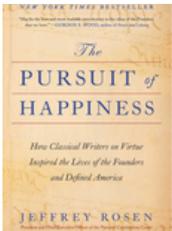
**The American Revolution: An Intimate History**  
Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns



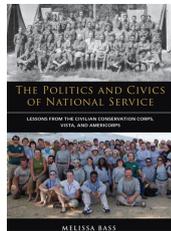
**Heart of the Nation: Volunteering and America's Civic Spirit**  
John M. Bridgeland



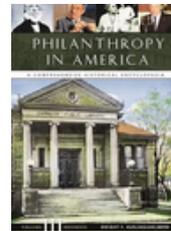
**Living With Purpose, Volume 1**  
Akhtar Badshah



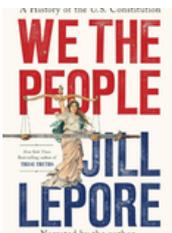
**The Pursuit of Happiness: How classical writers on virtue inspires the lives of the founders and defined America**  
Jeffrey Rosen



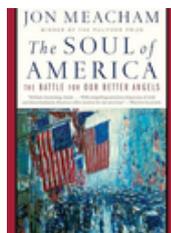
**The Politics and Civics of National Service**  
Melissa Bass



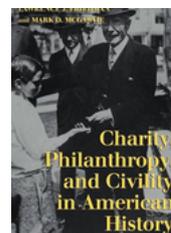
**Philanthropy in America: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia**  
Dwight F. Burlingame



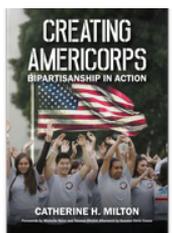
**We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution**  
Jill Lepore



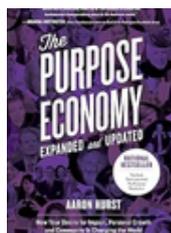
**The Soul of America: The Battle for our Better Angels**  
Jon Meacham



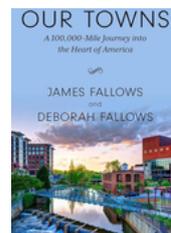
**Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History**  
Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie



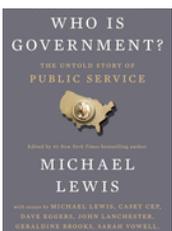
**Creating AmeriCorps: Bipartisanship in Action**  
Catherine H. Milton



**The Purpose Economy**  
Aaron Hurst



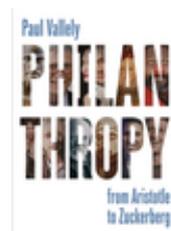
**Our Towns, A 100,000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America**  
James Fallows and Deborah Fallows



**Who is Government: The Untold Story of Public Service**  
Michael Lewis



**What I Found in a Thousand Towns**  
Dar Williams



**Philanthropy: from Aristotle to Zuckerberg**  
Paul Valley



# FAMILY FRIENDLY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Getting involved as a family fosters a lifelong habit of civic responsibility while strengthening internal bonds through shared purpose and empathy. Research shows that children who volunteer with their parents are significantly more likely to continue serving as adults, creating a generational legacy of community support.

- **Host a “250” meals food drive:** Collect 250 non-perishable items as a family to donate to a local pantry in honor of the 250th anniversary. While food banks often receive a surplus during the holidays, they face significant shortages throughout the rest of the year. To make your impact count, contact your local shelter first to ask for their "most needed" list. This is an excellent opportunity to teach your kids about intentional giving—ensuring that donations aren't just random extras, but items that truly meet the community's current needs.
- **The 250 welcome project:** Create a "Welcome to the Neighborhood" kit and a guided Community Tour for a new family to help them feel rooted in their new home. Have your children draw a kid-to-kid map of the neighborhood, highlighting the “important spots” (the best climbing tree, the house that give the best Halloween candy, fastest slide at the park). Include your family’s favorite local spots (your top 5 places to eat). Invite the family for a 20 minute history and community highlights walk.
- **Participate in the “Greatest American Cleanup”:** Join the national effort led by Keep America Beautiful to remove litter from local parks and waterways as part of their goal to clear 250 million pieces of trash by July 4, 2026.
- **Thank You notes for community workers:** As a family, identify the community workers who support your neighborhood, the postal carrier, waste collector or local librarian. Write them a Thank You note, letting them know how their service has made a difference in your life.

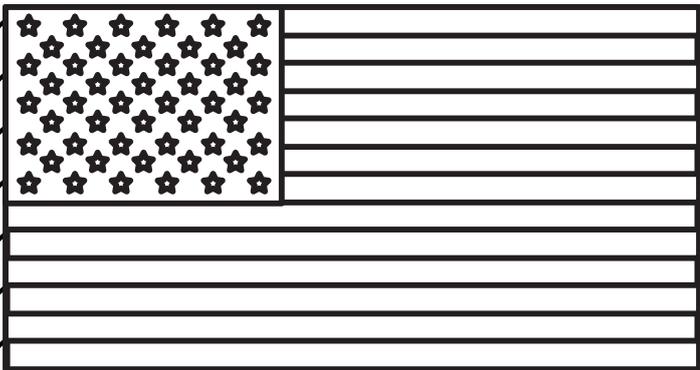
## Kindness activities to do with littles

- **Create "peace rocks":** Paint stones with kind words and hide them around your neighborhood for others to find.
- **Record a virtual story time:** Film them reading a favorite book about kindness to share with family, friend or a teacher.
- **"Love your earth" cleanup:** Head to the playground with a trash bag for a 15-minute clean-up challenge.
- **Help with micro-gardening:** Plant seeds in small pots to gift to a neighbor.
- **Start a Kindness Jar:** Have them write down every good deed they saw today and read them together before bed.
- **The toy audit:** Have kids pick 3 high-quality toys they’re ready to pass on and donate to a local shelter.
- **Sort change for a cause:** Let them collect loose change around the house, and select a charity to donate it to.

# COLORING PAGES

The closing words that started a nation, a profound call to service.  
The Declaration of Independence.

**“WE MUTUALLY  
PLEDGE TO EACH  
OTHER OUR LIVES,  
OUR FORTUNES,  
AND OUR  
SACRED HONOR”**

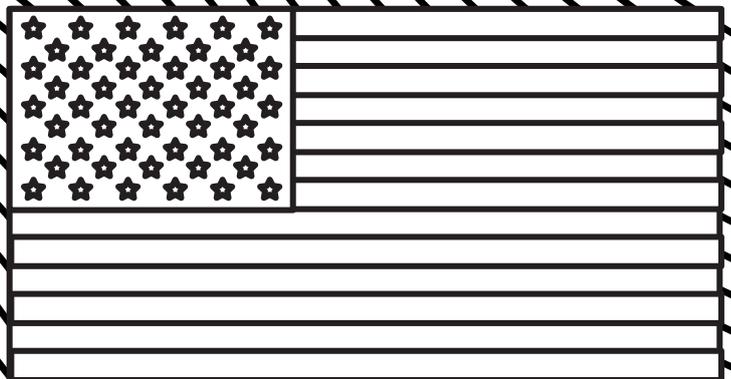


# COLORING PAGES

Martin Luther King Jr. famously argued that greatness is not found in status or wealth but in the transformative power of selfless labor for the common good.

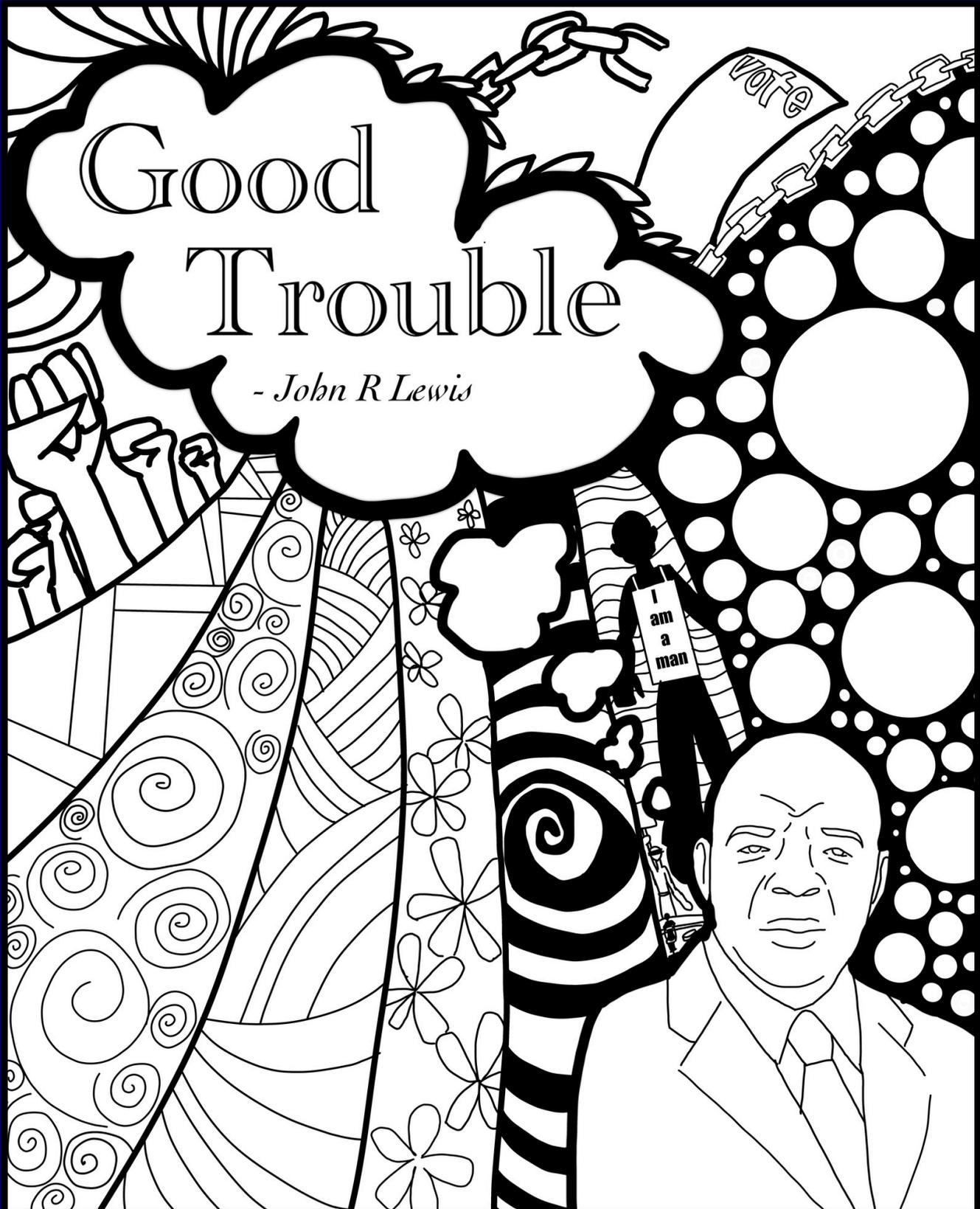
**“EVERYBODY  
CAN BE GREAT  
BECAUSE  
EVERYBODY  
CAN SERVE.”**

– Martin Luther King, Jr.



# COLORING PAGES

This coloring page was designed by Genevieve Hanson, a ninth grade student at John Lewis High School in Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia. Genevieve connects John Lewis's legacy to American ideals of liberty, human dignity, and mutual care.



# GUIDELINES FOR CREATING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

We invite you and your students to have conversations in your classrooms and wider community—from the perspectives of history, civic engagement, and democracy. Classroom engagement should strive to provoke new inquiry and reflection among your students about America’s founding and its impact today.

## Key concepts from the program

To support your teaching efforts, here are some of the key concepts that are explored in *250 & Beyond: Our American Story*:

### **The American ethos of service**

The American ethos of service was born over 250 years ago with a revolutionary idea: that government only legitimately exists to serve the people, and that citizens can govern themselves. This created not just a new form of government, but a new idea of citizenship rooted in service, civic responsibility, and the belief that ordinary people can and should shape the world around them.

### **The American experiment and the common good**

The principles that inspired the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution hinge on people coming together to prioritize the "common good" over selfish interests. The Founders' ultimate pledge of their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" serves as a foundational building block for understanding public service, the role of Congress, and the duties of elected officials and citizens today.

### **Our unfinished History and Expanding "We the People"**

This program explores how the Founders, though flawed and divided with opposing opinions, came together to create a "great machine" of American government. The conversation highlights how groups initially left out of the founding documents—including women, enslaved peoples, and Indigenous peoples—used the flexibility of this machine and their own vital service to the nation to claim their rights and expand the definition of "We the People".

### **Everyday Heroism and Civic Unity**

Beyond the founding era, this program explores how the spirit of service remains the "hidden connector" that keeps our modern communities running. By sharing diverse perspectives from across the country, the program helps students understand that everyday acts of civic virtue—from volunteering to running for local office—have the unique power to bridge political divides and unify the nation as we prepare for the next 250 years.

# EDUCATOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## The revolutionary idea

- **Defining "sacred Honor":** Brian Baird highlights the closing of the Declaration of Independence, where the signers pledged "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor". Sarah Botstein notes that these were wealthy individuals willing to "give it all away in service of an idea".
  - Questions for discussion: How does the concept of "sacred honor" differ from modern political motivations?
  - What risks did the Founders face that modern politicians generally do not?
- **The paradox of self-interest:** Brian Baird asks a central question of the American experiment: "If all you're interested in is self-interest, how do you work together for the common good?".
  - Questions for discussion: Can a democratic republic survive if citizens prioritize personal enrichment over the community?
  - How did the Founders attempt to solve this "conundrum"?
  - What examples can you think of throughout our history that demonstrate this?
- **"The Great Machine":** Sarah Botstein states, "The people who were left out at the beginning used the great machine of America and American history, and American government to make those things real".
  - Questions for discussion: What does Botstein mean by the "great machine"? Is the Constitution a static set of rules, or a tool for change?

## Expanding the "WE"

- **The "unfinished revolution":** Sarah Botstein mentions that it took "140 years" for women to secure the right to vote.
  - Question for discussion: How does the theme of "perfecting the union" relate to the "Second Reconstruction" of the Civil Rights movement? Did the "great machine" of government work too slowly, or did it work exactly as designed by requiring sustained civic pressure?
- **Service without rights:** African Americans served their country, in vital roles throughout history, when they themselves did not have the right to participate in democracy.
  - Question for discussion: Why would African Americans fight for the Union (or in later battles such as WWI) before they had full equality. How is military service a claim to citizenship?

# EDUCATOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## The role of Congress and representation

- **The "First Branch" of government:** Sarah Botstein notes that while we focus heavily on the Presidency today, the Founders focused mostly on Congress, listing it first in the Constitution.
  - **Question for discussion:** Why do you think the Founders placed the legislative branch (Congress) first? How does Sarah Botstein's argument, that Congress is meant to represent the people and check the other branches, compare to how you see Congress functioning today?
- **The delegate vs. trustee model:** Bob Inglis argues that to deserve a seat in Congress, "you have to be willing to lose the seat" to take a courageous stance. He states, "The worst thing that can happen to you is not losing an election, it's losing your soul".
  - **Question for discussion:** Should an elected official always vote exactly how their constituents want them to (the Delegate model), or should they vote based on their own judgment and conscience, even if it risks losing the next election (the Trustee model)?
- **Balancing self-interest and the common good:** Brian Baird notes that the Constitution relies on people working for the "common good," yet politics often involves "selfish interests". Donna Edwards adds that when leaders serve the common good, it works to everyone's benefit.
  - **Question for discussion:** Is it possible for a politician to be ambitious and seek power while still serving the "common good"? How can voters tell the difference between a leader serving "selfish interests" versus one serving the community?

## Civic duty and citizenship

- **Defining service:** Brian Baird describes service as the "hidden connector" that brings communities together. Donna Edwards defines it as "everybody doing their bit," from volunteering in schools to running for the school board. The National Museum and Center for Service defines service as "people giving of themselves in a spirit of kindness to help others, and make the world a better place".
  - **Question for discussion:** Based on these definitions, does "service" require a formal title or position to be labeled as a service to others? What are examples of "hidden connectors" in your own school or neighborhood that keep the community running?

# CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Activity: Community interviews

Using the "Community Interviews" resource, assign students to interview a "hidden connector" in their school or neighborhood—someone who serves without a formal title (e.g., a custodian, a food bank volunteer, a neighbor who cleans up the park).

Download the [community interview placemats](#) at [www.nmcfs.org/resources/community-interviews](http://www.nmcfs.org/resources/community-interviews) or [www.ouramericanstory.org/toolkit/the-spirit-of-service-civic-engagement](http://www.ouramericanstory.org/toolkit/the-spirit-of-service-civic-engagement).

## Activity: "Visible and Valued"

**Task:** Brian Baird mentions an initiative to make service "visible and valued" in schools and communities.

**Classroom Activity:** Identify one person in your school or local community who is a "hidden connector"—someone who serves without seeking attention (e.g., a custodian, a volunteer coach, a poll worker). Write a short paragraph and create a poster explaining how their service contributes to the "common good." Partner with a public community organization or find a prominent space on your school's campus to display these posters for others to learn about what service looks like in your community.

**Expansion:** Turn this classroom activity into a school legacy project, establishing a Campus Museum of Service. Learn how other schools have done this at [www.nmcfs.org/resources](http://www.nmcfs.org/resources).



# PRINTABLE WORKSHEET: THERE THEN, HERE NOW

In 1944, service looked like this:



Filipino American Red Cross surgical dressing unit, Washington, D.C. Left to right: Mrs. Conchita Perez and Mrs. J. Weldon Jones, wife of former insular auditor and acting high commissioner of Philippines [Library of Congress](#)

In 1964, service looked like this:



In the summer of 1964, civil rights organizations brought more than 700 student volunteers from colleges across the country to help Mississippi's Black residents register to vote. The volunteers also set up Freedom Schools for learners of all ages who had been denied an education. [PBS American Experience](#)

In my community today, service looks like this (draw or write):

# THERE THEN, HERE NOW

In 1776, service looked like this:



The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

Painting by John Trumbull, 1818. Credit: Yale University Art Gallery

In 1972, service looked like this:



A volunteer for the Meals on Wheels program prepares to leave to make deliveries.

Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

In my community today, service looks like this (draw or write):

# THERE THEN, HERE NOW

In 1906, service looked like this:



Earthquake, San Francisco. April 18, 1906. Food line at Relief Station run by the American Red Cross.

Library of Congress

In 1940, service looked like this:



Parishioners of St. Thomas Church resting after spending many hours preparing food for a benefit picnic supper. Near Bardstown, Kentucky

Library of Congress

In my community today, service looks like this (draw or write):



## Printable Worksheet: Discovering Service Through Primary Sources

### Our American Story

#### Part 1: Read

Printable versions of these documents can be found at the links below:

- Declaration of Independence (1776) <https://constitutioncenter.org/declaration>
- The U.S. Constitution (1787) <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution>

#### Part 2: Notice and Highlight

As you read, highlight or circle any words or phrases that:

- Exemplify the Founders intended about the role of service in a democratic society
- describe goals for society
- focus on unity and the common good

#### Part 3: Discuss the Big Ideas

Answer in complete sentences.

1. What founding principles or big ideas do you notice in the excerpts?

2. Choose one of the phrases you highlighted or circled. What do you think it means in your own words? Phrase: \_\_\_\_\_ Meaning (in your own words):

3. Why do you think this idea was important to the founders of the United States?



**Our American Story**

## **Printable Worksheet: A conversation on communities, service and democracy**

### **Reflection questions**

At the close of the Declaration of Independence, the signers mutually pledged their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" for the greater good. What does this profound level of personal risk and commitment reveal about the Founders' view of civic duty, and how should it inform our modern understanding of public service?

The Founders created a government and Constitution that acted as a "great machine" with an intentional amendment process. Knowing that these documents initially excluded many people (including women, enslaved peoples, and Indigenous peoples), how did the persistent service and civic action of these marginalized groups utilize the Founders' machine to expand the true meaning of "We the People"?



## **Printable Worksheet: A conversation on communities, service and democracy**

### **Reflection questions**

At the close of the Declaration of Independence, the signers mutually pledged their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" for the greater good. What does this profound level of personal risk and commitment reveal about the Founders' view of civic duty, and how should it inform our modern understanding of public service?

When framing the Constitution, the Founders intentionally established Congress as the "First Branch" of government, designed to closely represent the people and prevent the rise of a sovereign or despot. Based on this design, why is it so critical that those elected to office operate from a motive of service to the common good rather than selfish ambition?



**Our American Story**

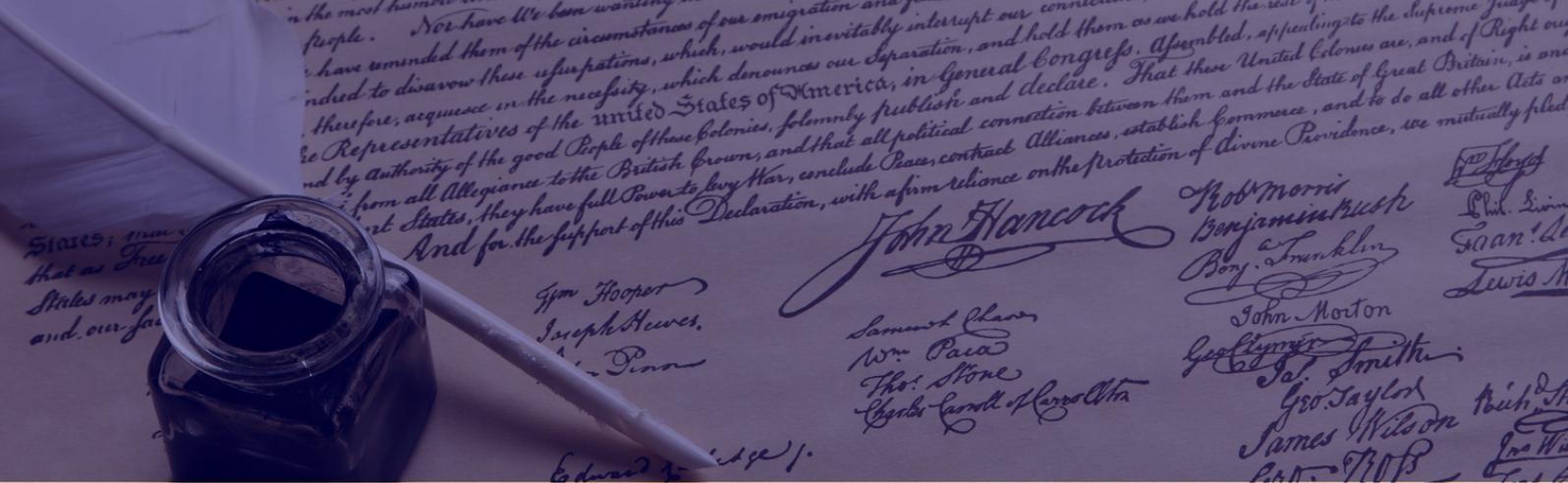
**Printable Worksheet:  
A conversation on communities,  
service and democracy**

**Reflection questions**

What is one act of service that made a lasting impact on your life—or someone else's?

Who are the "hidden connectors" in your own neighborhood, school, or community who serve without seeking attention? How can you help make their everyday acts of heroism more visible and valued?

As America prepares for its next 250 years, how do you envision your personal path in service over the next 5-10 years? What specific steps will you take to participate in building and sustaining a just society?



# 250 & BEYOND

## Our American Story

A conversation about communities, service and democracy.

Host Hon. Brian Baird

In conversation with:

Hon. Donna F. Edwards (Dem), Hon. Bob Inglis (Rep) and Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Rep)

Featured Guest: Filmmaker Sarah Botstein

Executive Producer: Julie Budkowski

WETA

Executive Producer: Amy Labenski

Producer: Chloe Kougiias

Directed/edited by: Cori Kipps

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Genevieve Hanson

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National Museum and Center for Service and Independent Sector

**NATIONAL MUSEUM  
AND CENTER FOR  
SERVICE**

**WETA**