Freeman Hrabowski III was 12 years old in 1963 when he was arrested and jailed for five days. He had participated with thousands of other students in the Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama. During the non-violent protest, police dogs, water cannons, and police batons were used to disperse the children. Pictures of police brutality against children demanding equality helped catalyze President Kennedy’s proposal of the Civil Rights Act, which ended legalized segregation. Hrabowski is now president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He attributes his success partly to what he learned during the Children’s Crusade.

In August 2014, protests erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, after Michael Brown was shot by a police officer. Brown was unarmed. Some witnesses reported that he said, “Don’t shoot!” with his hands up. Protesters expressed their anger about Brown’s death and about many previous cases when unarmed black men were shot by police. They called for broad reform of police procedures. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that events like Ferguson highlight a “real racial problem” in the U.S. Police spokespersons responded that the police do a dangerous job and are just trying to protect all citizens.

The Ferguson protests were mostly peaceful, but there were pockets of violence. Police responded with tear gas, smoke, armored vehicles, and arrests. In both 1963 and 2014, parents of children and teenagers who protested were criticized, even by some people who believed that the police actions were an injustice. Similarly, Malcom X, an African American leader who sometimes advocated violence, commented on the 1963 Children’s Crusade, “Real men don’t put their children on the firing line.” But Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the champion of non-violence, told parents, “Don’t worry about your children; they’re going to be all right. Don’t hold them back if they want to go to jail, for they are doing a job not only for themselves, but for all of America and for all mankind.”

In Ferguson, many parents took young children along to the protests, to learn about their right as U.S. citizens to assemble and speak freely against injustices. Additionally, parents said their children had the right to defend their beliefs. Critics argued that these parents were placing their children in danger, since even peaceful protests can end in violence.

Are the parents of child protesters acting recklessly? Or are they providing their children important lessons about civic rights and obligations?

Questions for Classroom Discussion:
- Have you ever attended a protest? Did it feel safe or dangerous?
- What kinds of injustices would you choose to protest?
- How would you feel if your parents prevented you from attending a protest about something very important to you?
- Besides protesting, how can people express their views and opinions?
- How else do parents put their children in harm’s way (e.g., enrolling them in dangerous sports)?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS  *and alternate parts of speech

disperse (verb) to spread out; to scatter or send in different directions

Sentence: Police dogs, water cannons, and police batons were used to disperse the children.

Turn and Talk: Why do police try to disperse protesters?

catalyze (verb) to cause or make happen more quickly

Sentence: These images helped catalyze President Kennedy's proposal of the Civil Rights Act.

Turn and Talk: Discuss some events that have catalyzed people into protesting in the streets.

segregation (noun) separation based on a certain quality, especially race

Sentence: After the Civil Rights Act ended legalized segregation, children of all colors could study at the same schools.

Turn and Talk: Even though racial segregation is illegal in the U.S., children of different races often study in separate schools. Why might this be?

reform (noun) change to improve something

Sentence: They called for broad reform of unfair and violent police procedures.

Turn and Talk: Propose some reforms to your school's homework policy.

*reform (verb) to improve by making specific changes

Sentence: The state reformed the school system by creating new graduation requirements.

Turn and Talk: What is one aspect of your community that needs to be reformed?

injustice (noun) unfairness, especially involving people's rights

Sentence: Protesting is a way to learn about the right to assemble and speak out against injustice.

Turn and Talk: Why is it important to stand up against injustice, even if the injustice does not directly affect you?
DO THE MATH

Children who protested segregation and racial injustice at the 1963 Children’s Crusade were met with fire hoses and police dogs. In recent years, government programs have supplied local police departments with military equipment from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The police in Ferguson, Missouri, used stun grenades and armored vehicles to disperse crowds of protesters. Many are calling for reform, saying that most police departments don’t need military equipment and are not trained to use it. They worry that military equipment will catalyze the use of police force and brutality when dealing with civilians.

Option 1: Between 2006 and 2014, the Department of Defense distributed over $5 billion in military equipment to local police departments. What is another way to write 5 billion?

A. $5,000 \times 1,000,000$
B. $5,000,000,000,000$
C. $5 \times 10^8$
D. $500 \times 10^5$

Option 2: The military equipment transferred from the Department of Defense to local police agencies included almost 100,000 machine guns. If these guns were dispersed evenly across the 50 states, how many machine guns would each state acquire?

$100,000 \div 50 = 2,000$ machine guns for each state

Discussion Question: The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees “the right of the people peaceably to assemble.” Many key events in United States history—from the American Revolution to the Civil Rights Movement—were catalyzed by public protests against injustice. But participating in a protest involves an element of risk, as police attempt to disperse crowds that can grow quickly. This risk has increased as police departments become more militarized. Still, protest remains an important vehicle for children and adults to stand up for their beliefs. Should police use military equipment at protests?
THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

In August 2014, people from all over the United States gathered in Ferguson, Missouri, to protest injustice and call for reforms in police treatment of minorities. As the protests got bigger and bigger, police used stun grenades and other military equipment to disperse the crowds. Stun grenades produce a bright flash of light and loud sound that temporarily blinds and deafens enemies.

The human ear can detect sounds over a very large range of volumes. For example, your headphones at the maximum volume are 100,000,000 times louder than a whisper! The quietest sound that humans can hear is called the threshold of hearing (TOH). All other sounds are compared to the TOH. For example, the sound of normal breathing is 10 times louder than the TOH.

Fill in the chart and then plot and connect the points on the graph below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of times greater than the threshold of hearing (exponent)</th>
<th># of times greater than the threshold of hearing (standard form)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal breathing</td>
<td>10^1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whisper</td>
<td>10^2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet conversation</td>
<td>10^3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regular exposure for more than one minute to noises that are 10^n times the TOH and louder can lead to permanent hearing loss. A stun grenade is 10^{17} times louder than the TOH. If stun grenades are so loud, why do you think they cause temporary (rather than permanent) deafness?

A stun grenade does produce a loud sound, but that sound does not last for more than one minute.

Exposure to loud sounds catalyzes hearing loss. Since militarized police departments use stun grenades to disperse crowds, should children be forced to stay away to protect their hearing? Or instead should police be prevented from using these devices that were designed to fight enemies during a war? If children are willing to put themselves in danger to stand up against injustice, should parents stop them? What is more dangerous to a child in the long term?
DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

☐ Parents who let their children attend protests are being irresponsible by putting them in harm’s way.

OR

B

☐ Parents who let their children attend protests are being responsible. They are teaching them important lessons about their democratic rights.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

☐ __________________________

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

“Can you show me evidence in the text that...”

“I believe that...”

“You make a good point, but have you considered...”

“I agree with you, but...”
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

disperse | catalyze | segregation | reform | injustice