

## Mapping Rhetoric: Cross-Analyzing Protest Movements

Eva Dunsky

*Designed for a First-Year Writing and Thinking course*<sup>1</sup>

### *Overview*

The unit will cover three protest movements: The CUNY 1969 protests, The Deaf President Now! campaign at Gallaudet University, and The Gaza Encampments at Columbia University. Students will watch three documentary films: The Five Demands, Deaf President Now!, and The Encampments.

For each campus unit, students will be assigned a position, i.e. administration, student activists, or counter protestors. Each unit will have a “teach-in” in which students are responsible for teaching their classmates about viewpoints within their position. Each teach-in will have a unique final assignment.

Following the final teach-in, students will form groups and choose another campus protest somewhere in the world throughout history and break down the different positions at play.

### Unit #1: CUNY 1969

*Logline:* This teach-in will prompt students to think about *audience*, *purpose*, and *context*. What were key figures, such as President Gallagher, demanding (purpose)? Who were they addressing (audience)? What different mandates were they juggling, and what forces were influencing their responses (context)?

*Learning goals:* translate the students’ Five Demands into rhetorical terms, apply the Demands to their original contexts, begin to become familiar with context surrounding CUNY 1969

Positions:

- Buell Gallagher (CCNY President)

---

<sup>1</sup> *N.B.* I designed this with my School of Visual Arts course in mind, which meets 1x/week for 3 hours at a time

- Khadija Deloache (co-president, City College Black and Puerto Rican Students Community)
- Francee Covington (SEEK student)
- Newton Hall occupiers

### Session 1: The Five Demands!

*Class Plan:* Students will be given the discussion questions in advance, then we'll watch the movie together as students take notes on these questions. After the movie, students will be put in small groups to discuss, after which they'll share their findings in a wider whole-class discussion.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. In the movie, a frustrated White teacher is shown yelling at a Black student to the point of abuse. What do these scenes, and the testimonials from City College alumni of color, suggest about the education that Black students received?
2. The S.E.E.K. program is described in the film as providing academic support services for students who did not get a strong educational foundation from their public schools. Wealthy people usually get tutors for their kids. Why do you think one is stigmatized as "remedial" and the other not? Can you think of any parallel double standards within your own educational journey?
3. Consider the outcome of the student protests: Open Admissions at City College. In "The Five Demands," Allan Ballard says he would have rather seen an expansion of and investment in the S.E.E.K. program as an alternative solution. What were the benefits of each approach? What were the obstacles each option presented? What outcome would you have argued for?
4. In "The Five Demands," testimonial quotes illustrate concepts of social exclusion: James Small says, "You weren't left out of college because you were dumb or you couldn't learn. You were left out because of the way society is structured, and you weren't structured into that process." How does the film explain this process of exclusion, as described by James Small? Does it still occur today? In what contexts do you witness social exclusion both in and beyond academic settings?
5. What do you learn in school? What were you not taught in school? What is missing from your curriculum? Whose voices and stories and histories? Is your cultural identity reflected in your learning materials? How much priority do you think cultural identity should be given?

6. Gurock goes on to describe this as an eye-opening moment that invited him to question his relationship as a Jewish man to the struggles of his peers of color. What are moments in your own life that have opened your eyes to the privileges connected to your identity in relationship to others in your community?
7. When is it okay to “disrupt” the social order—at what point in a process, if ever, is it time to break the rules? What steps were taken before and even during the takeover that failed, and what did that failure lead to? Are there moments in your life when you’ve been faced with a choice to escalate an issue or back down? What did you choose and why? On what actions do you draw the line, and why?
8. Where in the film did you witness moments of White people deciding to support the Black and Puerto Rican students? What moments were clear acts of solidarity, and which were less obvious, or perhaps not pushed as far as possible? Consider in light of today—what acts of allyship and solidarity do you feel called to take part in?
9. In “The Five Demands,” viewers witness how the media warped the narrative of the student protests, sometimes to extreme measures. An example given is that when Black women students were beaten by White students, the news coverage flipped the scenario. What is the responsibility of the media to truth? How can one responsibly determine the truth, or as close to the truth as possible?
10. Newspaper headlines pepper the film. What makes a catchy headline? Where is bias baked into the language used to describe a scene? How does the media use sensationalism, and to what end? Who does this “catchy language” harm?

## Session 2: Breaking Down The Demands

### *Class plan:*

- Students will have a broad discussion about reading goals and strategies
- Then, in groups, students will complete an activity adapted from [The Five Demands Discussion Guide](#)
  - Using strategies discussed, students will close read the five demands and translate them into this framework:

Demand	Value	Big-Picture Goal

For example:

Demand	Value	Big-Picture Goal
"The courses and programs offered at this school will be totally geared to community needs. For the first time we will be able to study our true past history in relation to our present condition."	The history of students from the community surrounding City College is important, critical and should reflect the student body.	A separate school of Black and Puerto Rican studies

Students will then be assigned roles and figures to research using archives such as the [CUNY 1969](#) website and [CUNY Digital History Archive](#).

*Think/Pair/Share:* After the film, students will write about these questions, discuss in small groups, then partake in a whole-class discussion.

### Session 3: Teach-In

*Class Plan:* In this teach-in, each position will present and advocate for their point of view (purpose) while explaining and considering the surrounding context and tailoring their approach to their audience. Students will assume the rhetoric and stance of their assigned role during this presentation.

As the roles are presenting, the rest of the class will write down a question for the presenting group/role on an index card, and at the end they'll be responsible for answering those questions.

## Unit #2: Deaf President Now!

*Logline:* "This teach-in will have students consider the campus protests covered so far to make a list of demands for their own academic institution."

### Key Figures:

- Brigetta Bourne-Firl

- Jerry Covell
- Greg Hlibok
- Elizabeth Zinser
- Jane Spilman
- I. King Jordan

## Session 1: Deaf President Now!

*Class Plan:* Students will be given the discussion questions in advance, then we'll watch the movie together as students take notes on these questions. After the movie, students will be put in small groups to discuss, after which they'll share their findings in a wider whole-class discussion.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. How is Brigetta's experience similar to and different from Francee Covington's at CUNY?
2. Name the different protest tactics the students use. Which are similar to CUNY 1969, and which are different?
3. Where does the strategy of foregrounding Deaf identity help the students achieve their goal? And when does the strategy cause further division?
4. How do the activists' backstories inform their approach to the protests?
5. When Jane Spilman first addresses the students after the new president is announced, they take issue with her speech. Why? Consider context, tone, body language, diction, etc.
6. At 0:27, there's a confrontation between students and a negotiator for the administration. The negotiator demands that students open the campus, and the students tell him to f\*\*\* off, which ramps up the conflict to a new level. Consider the similar moment of escalation that happens in "The Five Demands." What are the different roles here? How does the tone of each party shift, and how do these shifts affect the protest's tone overall?
7. The concept of "allyship" is fraught in this movie, because the board and new president elect claim they want to help the students and ensure their success. What do you think makes for a good ally? How about a bad ally? Think of specific examples.
8. The way these students band together despite their differences and interpersonal conflicts is an example of "coalition building," which refers to a number of individuals (often with differing views) coming together to achieve a common goal. What are the differences of opinion and approach between the student activists, and how do they overcome them to achieve their goal? Can you think of another example of coalition building that you've witnessed?

9. Deaf identity is not a monolith, as the film shows. What are the different variations of Deaf identity and how do they affect both the student activists and the protest as a whole?
10. What do you make of I. King Jordan's trajectory over the course of the movie?

## Session 2: Breaking Down The Demands

*Class plan:* Students will analyze the Gallaudet activists' four demands (modeled after CUNY), using the same framework as the CUNY unit:

Demand	Value	Big-Picture Goal

## Session 3: Teach-In

*Class plan:* In groups, students will inhabit the role of themselves to craft their own set of demands, modeled after the CUNY and Gallaudet demands list, for their own institution. Students will consider *audience*, *purpose*, and *context* when explaining, presenting, and backing up their demands with evidence. Other questions for students to consider:

- What is your role? Are your demands advocating on behalf of a particular group of students, or for the entire student body?
- Who is your audience? You get to choose to whom you're addressing your demands. How does consideration of this audience affect the demands themselves, and how they're presented?
- What relevant context is leading you to make these demands?
- What would need to happen for these demands to be realized and carried out?

## Unit #3: Gaza Encampments

*Logline:* This teach-in will have students practice annotating historical and present-day documents using [hypothes.is](https://hypothes.is) and [Voyant](https://voyant-tools.org/)

Key Figures:

- Columbia Administration
- Student Activists
- Press

## Session 1: The Encampments

*Class Plan:* Students will be given the discussion questions in advance, then we'll watch the movie together as students take notes on these questions. After the movie, students will be put in small groups to discuss, after which they'll share their findings in a wider whole-class discussion.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Mahmoud Khalil talks about how the university “pushes a certain narrative” in order to crack down on Palestinian activism. What are some examples of this narrative being pushed either by administrators or journalists?
2. What narrative is Khalil advocating/pushing?
3. Let's revisit: When is it okay to “disrupt” the social order—at what point in a process, if ever, is it time to break the rules? What steps were taken before and even during the takeover that failed, and what did that failure lead to? Are there moments in your life when you've been faced with a choice to escalate an issue or back down? What did you choose and why? On what actions do you draw the line, and why?
4. What are some examples of coalition building and solidarity demonstrated in the film?
5. What are the tools these student activists use? How are they similar to the other two student protests covered? How are they different?
6. Where do the film's sympathies lie, and how *specifically* do we know?

## Session 2: Mapping and Annotating Rhetoric

*Class plan:* We will review Columbia Spectator's [timeline of events](#), then students will use Voyant and Hypothesis to create word maps and group annotations of various communications put out by the individuals within their assigned roles.

## Session 3: Other Protests Worldwide

*Class plan:* In groups, students will choose a campus protest movement we haven't covered yet to present on. Presentations can take any form so long as they include both a visual and written component.

#### Session 4: Teach-In

*Class plan:* Students will share their presentations on various campus protest movements worldwide, guided by the following questions:

- What was this protest's purpose/goal?
- Who was the protest's audience?
- What context surrounding the protest is important to know?
- How are the roles and rhetoric within this movement similar to the ones we've studied?
- How is it different or unique?
- What are the main demands being made, and what values do these demands reflect?