

## Activism Through Art

**Objective:** Students will have an opportunity to take a public (yet anonymous) stance on an issue by completing the sentence prompt etched on the wall involving a topic that pertains to civil rights, personal aspirations/convictions, freedom, etc.

**Time:** One to two class periods

**Materials:** Pen/pencil, chalk, black poster board or school wall (with permission), paint (if poster boards are not used), sentence prompt

**Background:** TED Fellow and artist Candy Chang is gifted at transforming public spaces into works of art where people are encouraged to share their thoughts, insights, aspirations, and even frustrations with the larger community. In 2011, after experiencing the death of a loved one, Chang sought clarity and undertook a project entitled “Before I Die” that provided her with a fresh perspective. Chang’s project began when she painted the side of an abandoned building with chalkboard paint and etched the sentence “*Before I Die I Want to \_\_\_\_\_*.” Afterward, she invited community members to complete the sentence using chalk. Chang reported that the wall was completely filled the following day and found that people were very interested in self-expression via public spaces.

**Procedure:** After students are familiar with the fundamental tenets of Freedom Summer and the results of the project, ask students to brainstorm topics and/or issues they are passionate about. Ask them how they would convince the public to join their cause.

Afterward, introduce them to the work of Candy Chang. A brief bio is provided in the “Background” section. Have students visit her [website](http://candychang.com/) [http://candychang.com/] to read her complete biography and view projects she has spearheaded. Focus on the “Before I Die” project and explain that they will be asked to decide on an issue or topic and create a sentence prompt to which they (and members of the general community) could respond. After they have selected their issue and sentence prompt, help students create their own “word/sentence” wall, either on a poster or a classroom or school wall. If the project is taken outside of the classroom (e.g. into the hallways or outdoor public space) be sure to secure the proper permissions.

Encourage your students to unleash their inner Chang by creating their community wall of remembrance, dreams, etc. Think of a starter phrase, slogan, or sentence that directly relates to Freedom Summer themes such as “civil rights,” “voting rights,” “death,” “life,” “education,” et cetera. For example, your students’ sentence prompt



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may read “Freedom is \_\_\_\_\_.” “Equality means \_\_\_\_\_.” “I vote because \_\_\_\_\_.” “I have a dream that \_\_\_\_\_.” “Civil rights means \_\_\_\_\_.” Once students have prepped their wall with the desired sentence prompt, invite members of your school and/or the larger community to write on the wall.

As the wall begins to fill up, please take pictures! If your students are interested in sharing wall images, please tweet an image to @amhistorymuseum or @explorehistory; post to Facebook and tag the National Museum of American History; or email it to [historyteachers@si.edu](mailto:historyteachers@si.edu). These may be featured on the Summit *Tumblr* site so that young people across the nation and world can see how the National Youth Summit on the 1964 Freedom Summer Project has helped to shape your students’ thoughts or provided them with a new perspective.

## Online Word Wall:

Alternatively, create a “word wall” via the web using padlet at [padlet.com](http://padlet.com). An example of a collaborative wall created using padlet may be accessed at: <http://padlet.com/wall/1rbmyjr47x>.

Prior to constructing the online wall, set up a padlet account. Afterward, manage your class wall’s privacy settings. You may have students write their responses to the class’s sentence prompt by hand or add students’ e-mail addresses to the class padlet account to enable them to write on the wall individually. For more information on how to use padlet and this web tool’s features, please go to *Padlet Junction* at <http://jn.padlet.com/>.

## An Alternate Approach to the Word Wall Activity:

An alternate approach would be to create a voting ballot wall where those who are registered to vote could post their names on the wall alongside the date that they officially registered.

## Additional Reading(s):

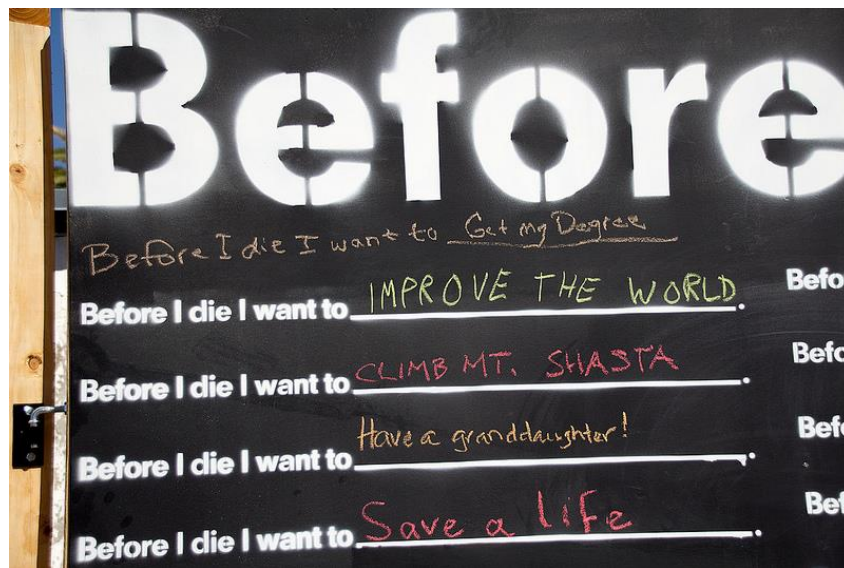
Biography. (n.d.). Candy Chang. Retrieved from <http://candychang.com/about/>.  
Projects. (n.d.). Candy Chang. Retrieved from <http://candychang.com/category/projects/>.



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“Before I Die” wall located in the North Loop neighborhood of Minneapolis at 212 3rd Avenue North. By Flickr user minnepixel via the Creative Commons



“Before I Die” wall in Oro Valley, Arizona. By Flickr user xoque via the creative commons license.

