Resources for Teaching Disability History

By Jana Remy (janaremy.com; @janaremy)
Note: this document is available at this link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ql_JaTqFFluUdrJrMHqSduLby-wOXokc3UOdzahNhYo/edit?usp=sharing

Introduction:

These resources give the historical background about the activism that led to the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which states:

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705(20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance…”

Activists realized that there were no provisions to mandate this 1973 legislation, which led to the 504 Sit-in in 1977. This Sit-In remains the longest nonviolent occupation of a federal building (25 days) in our nation’s history. Learning about this aspect of American history shows how activists fought for equal access to public education, public space, and the civil liberties of disabled people by paving the way for the passage of the ADA in 1990.

Most teachers are familiar with Section 504 because they prepare 504 Plans for their classrooms, however few know the important history behind this legislation.

Recommended textbook for Disability History:


Video about society’s approach to people with disabilities:

Stella Young, activist, TED video:
https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much

Importance of Disability issues to American History:


Link to abridged article: https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/edu/essay.html?id=70
504 Sit-In Overview

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/504_Sit-in

News Footage: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbfNJpFni-E

Primary Sources for Group Activity:

Excerpted from:

Suggested questions for these primary sources:
- What were the organizing strategies of the activists that participated in the Sit-In?
- What resources were helpful to their success?
- What were the backgrounds of the activists? How were their backgrounds helpful to their activism?
- In what ways did these activists defy stereotypes that society held about disabled people?
- Why is it important for today’s students to learn about the 504 Sit-In?

1) Judith Heumann: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1I3Nbewqn_Pfg6oAwEeXg7GCJMlyu1rGXIFe9q8VlemI/edit?usp=sharing
2) Kitty Cone 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/16Gf_FtS-VqS6e3al0eQ5EvCZeITyjZp6NNXdn_EF7MU/edit?usp=sharing
3) Kitty Cone 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/15yY4xibWVB8rhHFDvoQcUCT4KPmsm3rZairjOE6eiY/edit?usp=sharing
4) Corbett O’Toole 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FvS-LGnT4Fa4yV1En_g9UjYXm0bkFD6B0Y5OBYaCdY/edit?usp=sharing
5) Corbett O’Toole 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xYQTGa6izmk_fPDALRRWh3PG-rKhc3HoRtlDPVDuYyl/edit?usp=sharing
Conclusion, from Kitty Cone interview:

I would say that there were victories on many levels that came from that sit-in. For one thing, it was the public birth of the disability civil rights movement. People’s image of themselves changed, and people felt so proud of themselves...People who were involved in the sit-in really were transformed.