

# Taking a Knee

In this lesson, you will read about a controversial silent protest that was initiated by a National Football League (NFL) player. You will consider both sides of the issue and practice your debating skills.

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is a silent protest?
2. How does protesting relate to freedom of speech?
3. What does the word "patriotism" mean to you?
4. How do celebrities help bring about social change?



### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| ___ 1. oppression     | a) a mass gathering for a special cause or political reason           |
| ___ 2. platform       | b) an athlete without a contract who can sign with any team           |
| ___ 3. make headlines | c) a complaint over a wrongdoing                                      |
| ___ 4. rally          | d) to charge money for breaking a rule or law                         |
| ___ 5. unpatriotic    | e) causing disagreement and conflict among people                     |
| ___ 6. divisive       | f) to become a top news story   |
| ___ 7. free agent     | g) a place where one's thoughts and opinions can be shared and viewed |
| ___ 8. collude        | h) exhibiting a lack of pride for one's nation                        |
| ___ 9. activism       | i) cruel or unfair treatment  |
| ___ 10. grievance     | j) to work together to do something harmful or illegal                |
| ___ 11. fine          | k) to refuse to use or buy something as an act of protest             |
| ___ 12. boycott       | l) the active effort to bring about social or political change        |

## Reading

### TAKING A KNEE

*Protesting during the national anthem*

1. In August 2016, during a National Football League (NFL) preseason game, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a seat during the national anthem. In a postgame interview, Kaepernick explained that he was protesting the **oppression** of people of color and the use of police brutality against the black community. Kaepernick said he wanted to use his **platform** to give a voice to those without one.
2. Kaepernick's silent protest began to **make headlines**. At the next game, his teammate Eric Reid joined the protest. A player for the Seattle Seahawks (NFL) sat out for the anthem too. Out of respect for the military, Kaepernick switched from sitting during the anthem to taking a knee. The quarterback also announced plans to donate money to charities that promote racial equality.
3. Throughout September 2016, many athletes began to show support for Kaepernick and his message. Some teams linked arms during the anthem and others raised fists. The protest soon extended beyond the NFL. Many high school football teams began to kneel during the anthem, and some band members and cheerleaders did too. Megan Rapinoe, a gay American soccer player, knelt during the anthem before her game, saying she knew what it felt like to not have her rights protected in her country.
4. President Donald Trump did not approve of this form of protest. At a **rally** the following September, he called on NFL owners to fire any player who did not stand and respect the flag during the anthem. He continued criticizing the protest, using Twitter as his platform. Many Americans agreed that the protest was **unpatriotic** and felt Kaepernick should have used a different method of protest. Others, including the NFL players union, called the president's remarks **divisive** and unacceptable. Some NFL owners even took a knee during the anthem.
5. In the meantime, Colin Kaepernick had become a **free agent**. When no team picked him up for the 2017 season, he accused the NFL of **colluding** to keep him out of the league based on his **activism**. His former teammate and supporter Eric Reid, who had continued to kneel during the 2017 season, became a free agent the following year. When Reid remained unsigned for the 2018 season, he filed a **grievance** with the NFL as well.
6. During the off-season in May 2018, the NFL made a controversial announcement. All NFL players on the field would be required to stand for the national anthem. Those who did not wish to stand could remain in the locker room. Any player who protested during the anthem could be **fined**. Immediately following this NFL announcement, the hashtag **#boycottNFL** began to trend on Twitter.

*"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a country that oppresses black people and people of color."*

—Colin Kaepernick, NFL player

## Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. Discuss the subtitle of the reading. Why would Eric Reid insist that he was protesting "during" the anthem, not protesting the anthem itself?
2. Why does the reading mention gay rights?
3. According to Kaepernick, why did he switch from sitting to kneeling during the anthem?
4. What two examples of platforms are used in the reading?
5. How did Kaepernick and Reid respond after remaining free agents for too long?
6. What can be inferred from the last line of the reading?

## Vocabulary Review

### A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using a vocabulary word from page 1.

1. Those who don't personally face \_\_\_\_\_ are less likely to stand up for equal rights.
2. As a \_\_\_\_\_, he can say yes or no to any team that wants him.
3. Is it \_\_\_\_\_ to protest wars you don't agree with?  
What if you think the war is a bad idea for your country?
4. The black woman filed a \_\_\_\_\_ against her employer when she realized that her white colleagues earned more per hour.
5. Being a famous actor gives you a \_\_\_\_\_. Be the voice that others can't be.

### B. Synonyms

Circle the two synonyms in each group of words.

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1. a) rally<br>b) assembly<br>c) activist | 3. a) headline<br>b) front-page<br>c) divisive | 5. a) unpatriotic<br>b) colluding<br>c) disrespectful | 7. a) rally<br>b) oppression<br>c) cruelty |
| 2. a) fight<br>b) collude<br>c) conspire  | 4. a) hostile<br>b) divisive<br>c) platform    | 6. a) platform<br>b) oppression<br>c) opportunity     | 8. a) fine<br>b) charge<br>c) oppress      |

## Discuss

Work with a partner or in small groups.  
Discuss the following questions.

1. What are different ways that people show pride during the national anthem?
2. What's the difference between "an anthem protest" and "a protest during the anthem"?
3. In your opinion, is sitting or taking a knee during the anthem unpatriotic? What other actions are unpatriotic?
4. Does freedom of speech include the right to silently protest?
5. Is police brutality a problem in your region?  
How does it relate to racism?

## Debate

Below are two topics to debate in small groups or pairs. Your teacher will tell you if you will be debating for or against the idea. You will have ten minutes to prepare your arguments.

### Topic #1

Professional athletes should be allowed to use their platform and "take a stand" in the form of a silent protest during the national anthem.

### Topic #2

Everyone should show respect and pride for their own nation, flag, and military by proudly standing, removing their hat, and placing their hand over their heart during the national anthem.

## Write

Choose one of the questions below.  
Write a paragraph in your notebook stating your own opinion.

1. There are better times and places to protest racial inequality than during the national anthem.
2. Disallowing athletes from peacefully protesting during the national anthem proves that people still face oppression in the US.
3. Celebrities must continue to use their platforms to conquer social problems such as racial injustice.

## Critical Thinking

### THE WHITE HOUSE

President Trump agreed with the NFL's announcement in May 2018 but did not think players should be allowed to wait in locker rooms. He insisted that all players should stand proudly for the national anthem.

In June 2018, the 2018 NFL Super Bowl champions, the Philadelphia Eagles, were expected to visit the White House, but some had decided not to. The day before the visit, President Trump canceled the event and released this statement:

*"The Philadelphia Eagles are unable to come to the White House with their full team to be celebrated tomorrow. They disagree with their President because he insists that they proudly stand for the National Anthem, hand on heart, in honor of the great men and women of our military and the people of our country. The Eagles wanted to send a smaller delegation, but the 1,000 fans planning to attend the event deserve better."*

Discuss President Trump's statement with your group.

# Useful Expressions & Transitions for Debating

## Agreeing and Disagreeing

- That doesn't take away from the fact that...
- That's beside the point.
- With all due respect...
- I agree with you there.
- I agree with ---- (name).
- I see your point, but...
- That may be true, but...
- We're going to have to agree to disagree.
- I get/see where you're coming from, but...
- I'm afraid I disagree entirely.
- I'm afraid I'd have to disagree.
- I agree to some extent, but...
- I disagree with you there.
- Pardon me for disagreeing, but...

## Interrupting / Asking to Contribute

- I hate to interrupt, but...
- If I may come in here...
- I'd like to add something.
- Would you like to contribute something?
- I'd like to raise a point.
- If I could speak for a moment...
- I'd like to cut in here.
- You haven't answered my question.

## Persuading

- Can you see where I'm coming from?
- I challenge you to give this a try/chance.
- I want you to see it my way.
- Put yourself in my shoes.
- Am I getting through to you?

## Expressing an Opinion

- In my honest opinion...
- It is my belief that...
- From my experience...
- From where I look at it...
- From my point of view...

## Clarifying / Rephrasing

- Let's be clear here...
- I think you misunderstood what I said.
- What I said was... (repeat a point that was misunderstood or confused)
- What I meant to say was... (rephrase something in a way that is clearer)
- In other words...
- What I was trying to say before I was interrupted is that...

## Summarizing / Concluding

- So let me get this straight. You think...
- To conclude...
- I'd just like to summarize by saying...
- Finally, I'd like to reiterate that...
- It's time to take stock of what we've heard today.
- Both sides have some valid points.
- The stronger argument/team today is...