Seat at the Table
Family Guide

“If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”
- Shirley Chisholm

Who was Shirley Chisholm?
Shirley Chisholm was born in 1924 in Brooklyn, New York to parents of Caribbean immigrants. As a young girl she lived and went to school in Barbados. She decided to build her career in education. She earned multiple university degrees and worked as a nursery school teacher, nursery school director and as a daycare director. In time, she became known as an authority on issues of early childhood education and the welfare of children.

Life in Public Service
Shirley became interested in public service, and in 1965 she was elected to serve the state of New York in the state legislature. In 1968, she was elected as a United States Congresswoman, representing New York. She worked hard to improve life for people she represented, including giving minimum wage to domestic workers, increasing funding for education, and proposing an idea to have the federal government fund childcare for working parents. In 1972, she ran to be the Democratic candidate for President of the United States.

Shirley’s Legacy
Shirley Chisholm was a person of many firsts: the first black Congresswoman, the first black person to run for president, and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Despite all these memorable milestones, when asked how she’d like to be remembered, Shirley said, “I'd like them to say that Shirley Chisholm had guts.” Shirley’s voice in Congress meant that more and different people were represented at the table. She stepped up, claimed her seat at the table of public discourse, and made a difference.

At the Institute: The Kennedy Institute made a special exhibit honoring Shirley Chisholm and other trailblazers who worked toward a more representative democracy. Learn more about the exhibit at: https://bringyourownchair.org/
Bring Your Seat to the Table

Design a seat that represents you and your ideas

Step 1: Think about the issues you care most about. What should our elected officials be working on?

Step 2: Consider what pictures, words, and symbols best represent the issues or ideas that matter to you.

Step 3: Use the space below to plan your design for your own seat at the table. To create your seat, use our paper chair template or ask your parents if you can use supplies around your house to decorate a full-sized chair.

Step 4: Share your chair with us by visiting bringyourownseat.org.

Need help with your paper chair? Check out our templates and video tutorials with step-by-step folding instructions.
https://www.emkinstitute.org/online-resources

Share your work online. Tag us @EMKInstitute and use the hashtag #Civicsathome.