

Teaching American Government using Primary Documents

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Big Ideas of the Lesson
1. Teaching the abstract basic principles of the Constitution – popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism.
2. Using the Library of Congress' primary resources to teach abstract content and process of how our government works using various publishers' textbooks.
3. Integrating American History and Government.

Lesson Time: 2 - 55 minute class periods or 1 - 90 minute block.

Lesson Abstract: (summary of main points)

In this lesson students will use actual events to understand abstract concepts. The concepts taught are the separation of powers, checks and balances, balance of power between the three branches of the federal government, and enumerated and implied powers. This lesson can be taught using the following textbooks. Government textbooks used are *We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution*, Prentice Hall's *Magruder's American Government*, and Holt, Rinehart, and Winston *American Government*. This lesson can also be used while teaching American History using the following textbooks – Prentice Hall *America: Pathways to the Present*, McDougall-Littell *the Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century*, and Holt *United States History*.

This lesson also demonstrates why it is important to us primary sources in the classroom. Primary sources help students relate in a personal way to events of the past and promote a deeper understanding of history as a series of human events. Primary sources are snippets that encourage students to seek additional evidence through research. Teachers who use primary sources are using critical thinking skills required by state standards. These resources allow students to draw on prior knowledge, wrestle with contradictions and compare multiple sources that represent differing points of view. Finally, these types of resources will allow students to construct content knowledge and deepen understanding while researching topics.

****NOTE TO the TEACHER:** The teacher can use these primary sources as an introduction to the theme of basic constitutional principles, in support of the textbook materials, or as an assessment covering this theme.

Also, supplemental materials have been listed teachers to use as enrichment assignments and/or to expand on the basic Constitutional concepts listed in the Big Ideas of the Lesson and Key Concepts section.

Content Expectations or Standards

C3 Structure and function of government in the US of America

3.1 Structure, functions, and enumerated powers of national government

3.1.5 Use case studies or examples to examine tensions between the three branches of government

3.2 Powers and limits on powers

3.2.1 Explain how the principles of enumerated powers, federalism, and separations of powers, checks and balances, rule of law... serve to limit the power of government.

3.4 System of law and laws

3.4.1 explain why the rule of law has a central place in American society

C5 Citizenship in the US of America

5.1.1 Using examples, explain the idea and meaning of citizenship in the US, and the rights and responsibilities of American citizens.

5.4 Responsibilities of Citizenship

5.4.2 Describe the importance of citizen's civic responsibilities including obeying the laws...and performing public service.

Integrated GLCEs

US History and Geography

USHG Era 8 – Post World War II US (1945 – present)

8.2 Domestic policies

8.2.4 Domestic conflicts and tensions

9.3 Policy debates

9.3.1 Compose a persuasive essay on public policy issue, and justify the position with reasoned argument.

Key Concept(s)

Powers of the President, checks and balance, enumerated powers, implied powers, balance of power, separation of power, and federalism.

Instructional Resources - Student Resource and Teacher Resources

***Designing Your Lesson Plan With Primary and Secondary Sources**

By: Abby Combs

[Designing Your American Memory Lesson Plan
Primary and Secondary Sources](#)

***Using the Library of Congress**

By Karen Becknell

[Inspired by History Script](#)
[Location Navigation Notes](#)
[Using The Library of Congress](#)

****How to Work with and Copy Library of Congress Resources**

By: K. Koskela

[Instructions - Copy, Bookmark, Link](#)

****WebQuest: Using the Library of Congress for Primary Sources**

By: Donna Comstock-Herman

[Lesson Plan](#)
[WebQuest](#)

Links to the U.S. Constitution:

<http://topics.law.cornell.edu/constitution>
http://www.constitution.org/constit_.htm
<http://www.house.gov/house/Constitution/Constitution.html>

Government Textbooks:

Magruder's American Government Unit 4 – chapters 2, 13, and 14; Unit 5 – chapter 18.
Holt American Government Unit 3 the Executive Branch chapters 7 and 8; and
Unit 4 The Judicial Branch chapter 11.
We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution Unit 2 – lessons 7, 14, Unit 6 lessons -
35, and 36.

American History Textbooks:

Prentice Hall America: Pathways to the Present chapters 25 and 26.
McDougal- Littell: The Americans – chapters 24 and 25.
We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution - lessons 7, 17, 35
Holt United States History - chapter 10.

Classroom Materials / Technology

Blackboard, projection screen, or a smart board.

Access to the school's media center or computer lab.

Textbooks

Additional Teacher Resource Book

Critical Thinking using Primary Sources in U.S. History by Wendy S.

Wilson and Gerald Herman. J Weston Walch Publisher. Portland, Maine.

www.walch.com

This book is reproducible. See the appendix for the Mock Trial handouts.

Ronald Reagan – Nomination of Supreme Court Nominee – Sandra Day O'Connor:

Reagan takes oath of office 1981

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pin:3:./temp/~ammem_tEb4:::@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor)

[bin/query/D?pin:3:./temp/~ammem_tEb4:::@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pin:3:./temp/~ammem_tEb4:::@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4jUfA_b9SQ

Sandra Day O'Connor nomination letter and provides teacher content summary and the letter for printing:

<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/oconnor.html>

US Documents- LOC:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/links/>

Constitution:

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/NewNation.html>

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdccc0801)))

[bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdccc0801\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdccc0801)))

Supplemental Instructional Resources

Selective Service Acts and Proclamations:

Carter's pardon of the draft dodgers:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/proclamations/04483.html>

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/11623.html>

Alvin C York WWI Draft cards 1917-

<http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/military/ww1/draft-registration/>

Alvin C York – biography and draft card and IRS for tax evasion
http://www.teachamericanhistory.org/File/Alvin_C_York_1.pdf

Best to use gives images of famous people in WWI and their draft cards.
<http://www.archives.gov/southeast/exhibit/4.ph>

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pin:3:/temp/~ammem_Gf3x::@@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsbCRW0iwVg>

Richard Nixon links – resignation letter and the filling of S Agnew's VP spot:

Nixon takes oath of office 1969
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ7oO2G4Brg&feature=related>
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pin:5:/temp/~ammem_5oG3::@@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor

Nixon's Resignation letter:
Best link- gives reason why.
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/nixon2.html

<http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/index.html?dod-date=809>

Nixon's "I am not a crook TV address to the nation:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxeFMHyOx3I&feature=related>

Nixon's resignation speech to the nation and announces he will resign.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEOGJJ7UKFM&feature=related>

Agnew Resignation and Gerald Ford letters how Nixon sought advice in order to implement the 25th Amendment.
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/ford-nixon-letter/>

Lesson Sequence

Topic A – Ronald Reagan’s nomination of Sandra Day O’Connor

Step 1: Theme Openers -

Organize the class into several groups small groups (of 2 to 3 students). Assign to each group one of the basic principles on which the Constitution is based on: popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Next have the students research how the particular principle assigned to their group ensures the peoples authority over government.

***Assessment:**

Then have each group write a song or poem that includes the definition of their assigned principle and an example or picture of how the people’s authority is ensured based on their principle. Each group will sing their song or recite their poem to the class. This should lead to a short class discussion of each principle.

^Teacher may grade these on the basis: a clear definition, example of it being used from history, and a picture or cartoon representation.

Step 2 – Powers of the President –

Now, have the students begin reading Article 2 of the Constitution and create a graphic organizer/flow chart of the powers of the president. (The students can use their textbook or the internet site to outline the powers granted to the President).

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/NewNation.html>

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi->

[bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdccc0801\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdccc0801)))

Links to the Constitution:

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/NewNation.html>

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi->

[bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdccc0801\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdccc0801)))

The instructor should discuss these powers with the students and list them on the blackboard, overhead, or a smart board.

Review with the students why the Founding Fathers found it necessary to create the office of President at the Constitutional Convention. Ask the students what problems the Articles of Confederation had created? Ask students why did the Founding Fathers make the executive branch the second article of the Constitution? (– this material is available in the students’ textbook and / or the instructor may have all ready covered this material – prior knowledge).

***Assessment:**

The instructor should grade these notes based on content and how well the student participates in the class discussion – Does he or she understand the powers? Does he or she have an example of when this power was used. This information would be prior knowledge from the student's American History courses.

Step 3 – Ronald Reagan and Sandra Day O'Connor Nomination-

Instructor will show Ronald Reagan taking the oath of office - play the You Tube link for Reagan taking the oath of office and the LOC picture of Ronald Reagan being sworn in by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pin:3:/temp/~ammem_tEb4::@@@mdb=rbpebib,coolbib,mtj,scsmbib,mal,mjm,mcc,papr,pin,presp,mgw,nfor

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4jUfA_b9SQ

Have the students to list in their notes what basic Constitutional principles are involved in the snippet and the photograph. Have the students list these principles on the board and support their decisions. (Students may need to use their textbooks for support).

The instructor can also use the LOC links for analyses sheets for photographs and movies/video.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

****Assessment:**

Completing the LOC analysis sheets can be used by the instructor as a homework assessment, a pop quiz, or as notes for writing prompt.

Step 4: The students will go the media center to research Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and will collect notes covering the justice's educational background, employment history, important cases and decisions, length of service, involvement in state or national politics, etc. The learners will present and oral summary of O'Connor.

^^Below is an example of a research fact-finding-sheet that the instructor may find useful.

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Student's Name _____ Date _____

Topic: Learning about a US Supreme Court Justice

Directions: As you research the Justice fill in the blanks using complete sentences.

Justice's name:

Date and place of birth:

Education:

Political career, political party affiliation, offices held or sought, etc.:

Judicial experiences:

Court Decisions:

=====

Step 5: The teacher assigns the students to write a letter nominating O'Connor to the Supreme Court. The class will review these letters. Teacher then displays Reagan's nomination letter of O'Connor to the class.

<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/oconnor.html>

Discuss how the students' letters are different from Reagan's.

Ask the questions: Why did Reagan write the letter this way – that is addressed to the US Senate?

What if Reagan had written the letter to the Supreme Court?

Ask the students what abstract concepts does this document illustrate? -
(This should lead to the understanding that all three branches of the government have and interrelationship).

How does this letter lead to a separation of powers?

How does this letter lead to the understanding of checks and balances?

*******Assessments:- Main assessment for the lesson plan*******

The students are going to role play as journalists for national news paper, TV news broadcaster, or as a citizen explaining to an alien from the planet York how the basic constitutional principles are found in the nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor to the US Supreme Court.

^^ You can easily incorporate this part of the lesson with the English Department for a cross-curricular activity. The students will then have two assessments (using different grading requirements) and expand the students' skills of research, critical thinking, writing, and speech. The teacher should use the writing rubric/grading rubric most commonly used by the English Department. (For example the Collin's writing format employed by some school districts – see link below for Collins

<http://thewritingsite.org/resources/approaches/collins/default.asp>

***This assessment should be the major grade for the lesson plan.

****An Alternate Assessment for at risk learners:** The instructor has the students create a poster (flow chart) that explains (a) how the President fills a vacancy in the US Supreme Court; (b) what constitutional principles are involved and why, and (c) the poster flow chart must have pictures that depict each stage of the process.

Enrichment and Expansion Topics

Topic B - Enrichment – beyond the lesson Richard Nixon and Alvin York:

1. The instructor can use the links to Richard Nixon's letter of resignation to teach the same basic principles of separation of powers, checks and balances, rule of law, and the involvement of all three branches of government.

2. The instructor can use the links to Alvin York's draft card to teach the concept of federalism.

^^The Instructor would use a similar format as the one explained above.