

## **Overview of Research:**

This course has compelled me to look at moving beyond the ideas of simply “covering” topics within my American Government course and finding activities that create opportunities for students to become independent critical thinkers. As various topics relating to primary sources were discussed, I recall a class that I took as an undergrad in earning a degree in History. In my experiences with social studies from grade school through the first two years of college, the main form of information was a lecture of historical events. While there were some chances to look at primary documents, I was never given much of a chance to analyze a particular event, that process had already been done. It wasn’t until my third year in college that I was presented with the idea of taking information, even if it was generated many years before, and generate different interpretations other than what might have been presented in a text book.

The book that I recall providing insight for this is titled After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection. As part of the course, we looked briefly at its contents, but did not use it for many direct activities. I have taken a closer look at the book as a result of this class, and I have used some of the ideas to redesign my American Government unit that deals with the documents created before, during and after the Revolutionary Period.

## **The Challenge:**

As a social studies teacher, I am constantly looking for ways to bring more life to the reading and learning of history. The challenge is to create projects that excite curiosity by examining evidence, pose questions, and reach answers in an engaging way. School textbooks by design look to summarize knowledge, providing little explanation for how that knowledge was gained. Primary documents can take a bit more time than simply reading a section or chapter from a text, though benefits of the skills learned may be worth it. My ultimate goal is to combine content with the processes of the social studies discipline in a way that students can move away from recollection of facts and figures and into a logical use of learning tools.

## **Past Practice:**

When looking at key documents such as the Magna Carta, the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, the common activity for each has been to reword them into a modern form. Students typically struggle with the forms of writing as far back as 1215 through 1791. I provide a great amount of help when they struggle with words such as *chattels* or *usurpations*. I do see that there is some value in what these documents might look like if they were written today. The flaw with this is might be that some of the historical context is lost, mainly the question of why were these documents created? I feel that it is important to place the students in the given time period for each, and analyze the choices made, positive or negative, and justify them at that point rather than today.

### **Unit Plan Revisions:**

The opening unit of American Government is based on the general purposes and forms of governments found across all places and times. This will serve as the foundation for looking at the influences of the Greek, Roman and English concepts of government. One direct example of this will deal with the Magna Carta. I will provide the students with a greater amount of historical background as to how life was in England in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which will create greater relevance to the ideas found within the Magna Carta. This will then be connected to the themes that students will find in the English Bill of Rights and the United States Declaration of Independence. I will draw upon the general ideas of individual rights, economic rights, social class struggles and international relationships as potential common ties between all of these documents.

Activities based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights will be redesigned to put the students through the actual process of creating a plan for government and debating the balance between national, state and individual rights. I will devote a full week to the establishment of a constitutional convention where students will debate whether or not the Articles of Confederation have created a useable and stable government. A second simulation will focus on the plan to form a new government, dividing powers, responsibilities, and rights among the different levels. Upon completion, the students will compare their efforts to that of the actual Constitutional Convention to see any similarities or differences. The final major component will be looking at creating a Bill of Rights and narrowing down the proposed ideas to

the ones that were finally chosen. In doing this, students can analyze the reasons for including certain rights, while excluding others, and interpret why this might have happened.

### **Scaffolding Student Skills:**

The key element for this unit will be to get students to think as historians would think. I will have to place take the students out of the modern-day mindset and place them into the context of the period. I will have to explain to them that priorities of today were certainly not always priorities of the past. When students debate choices, it will be important for them to understand that there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer, though they must argue with some logic that supports the role that they are playing. When the connections need to be made as to why historical documents from early American Government still affect us today, I will work to help them develop concrete examples that they can connect with as 14 and 15 year olds.

### **Assessing Results:**

When assessing the entire unit, I will feel more comfortable asking the students to think on their own in addition to the standard objective questions. The following are examples of topics that I would use to gauge student comprehension: How do you think that those who created (and signed) the Declaration of Independence hoped that their lives would change, including risks and rewards? What major issues did you experience in the drafting of a Constitution, and how were they resolved? If you could include another amendment in the Bill of Rights, what would it be? Why do you believe this amendment was not included?

### **Sample Lessons Within the Unit:**

#### **“Interpreting the Declaration of Independence from Draft to Final”**

##### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson focuses on the drafting of the Declaration of Independence in June of 1776 in Philadelphia. Students will analyze an unidentified historical document and draw conclusions

about what this document was for, who created it, and why. After the document is identified as Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, students will compare its text to that of the final document adopted by Congress on July 4, 1776 and discuss the significance of differences in wording.

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Examine documents as primary sources;
- Analyze and compare drafts;
- Describe the significance of changes to the document's text.

Standards Met:

**B.12.1. B.12.2. B.12.3. B.12.4. B.12.6. B.12.13.**

Time Required

- One to two classes

### **Procedure**

1. Working with the entire class, discuss students' understanding of a document. Ask the following questions to frame the discussion:
  - What is a document?
  - What are examples of common documents?
2. Explain that in this lesson students will take a close look at an important historical document. Distribute copies and engage students with the first page of the Declaration of Independence.
3. Ask students to draw conclusions about what this document was for, who created it, and why. Reveal (or confirm) its identity as the first page of Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence. Pass out copies of the first printed version of the Declaration of Independence while reviewing students' prior knowledge.
  - Ask students to summarize what they know about the Declaration of Independence. Possible questions include:
    - What was happening during this time period?
    - What importance does this document have?
  - Encourage students to think about the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. Possible questions include:
    - Who might have made the changes to the original draft?
    - Where and how might debates and compromises have taken place regarding such changes?
4. Assign students (working in pairs or groups) specific pages from (or the entire set of) Declaration of Independence: Making Comparisons handout for analysis and comparison.
  - Ask students to first identify unfamiliar vocabulary.
  - Encourage students to analyze and compare the wording of the two versions by marking and making notes directly on the Declaration of Independence: Making Comparisons handout.
  - Ask students to record their responses to the following questions on a separate piece of paper:
    - What do you think is the most significant difference(s) in wording between Jefferson's draft and the adopted Declaration of Independence?
    - Why do you think this change(s) was made?

- How does this difference(s) in wording change your understanding of the text's meaning, if at all?
5. **Group Conclusions:** Working with the entire class, discuss their responses, page by page, to the questions above. Conclude by emphasizing that those who created (and signed) the Declaration of Independence understood the potential significance of every word in the document to their own lives, the new Nation, and the world.

### **Extension**

- Use the online activity "The Declaration of Independence: Rewriting the Rough Draft" to experiment with different versions of the first two paragraphs of the Declaration. Discuss how each version might have changed the nation's future.

### **“Did the U.S. Constitution create a more perfect union?”**

### **Lesson Overview**

In the fall of 1787, the federal convention among the states concluded its closed door meetings in Philadelphia and presented the nation with a new model for the government. It is now up to each special state convention to decide whether to replace the Articles of Confederation with this new constitution. The debate is passionate and speaks directly to what the founding fathers had in mind in conceiving this new nation. Does this new government represent a positive or negative shift for the United States' future?

### **Objectives**

- the forces that shaped the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation and the Constitution;
- that government is based on written documents;
- that the Constitution was a nationalist victory over state autonomy; and
- that the Articles of Confederation were not replaced solely because they were inadequate.

**Standards Met: B.12.2. B.12.3. B.12.4. B.12.6. B.12.13.**

### **Time Required**

- Three-six Days

### **Lesson Procedure**

The students have already studied Colonial America and the Revolution. This unit on the U.S. Constitution begins with an examination of what type of government would best represent the ideals of the American Revolution. Once these factors are identified, the Articles of Confederation are examined, the reasons for calling a Federal Convention are explored, and the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention are studied. Finally the ratification process is studied and the broadside project is completed.

### ***Essential Question:***

Where does power reside in the relationship between people and government?

### ***Unit Question:***

Was the Constitution an abandonment of the ideals of the American Revolution?

### **Lesson 1: Creating a Government (1-2 class periods)**

1. Introduce unit on the Constitution.
2. Present the question to the students that will be addressed in the Government Workshop:  
*Given the ideals of the American Revolution as represented in the Declaration of Independence, what type of government would you create?*
  - Students divide into small groups of 3-4 persons each.
  - Each group chooses or is assigned to represent a political orientation: radical or conservative.
3. Distribute the Articles of Confederation and assign homework: read the Articles of Confederation and compare to the key points identified in the classroom activity.

### **Lesson 2: Calling a Federal Convention (1-2 class periods)**

1. Introduce the Annapolis Conference and the debate over whether to call a Federal Convention.
  - In this activity, students make preliminary identifications of arguments for and against the Convention.
2. At the conclusion of the debates, the class discusses the reasons for and against the call for a Federal Convention that have been identified in this activity.
3. Assign reading homework from the textbook on what happened in the Constitutional Convention.
- 4.

### **Lesson 3: Drafting the Constitution, Part I (1-2class periods)**

1. Discuss with the class the major issues in the drafting of the Constitution, and how they were resolved. The four major points are:
  - What to do with the Articles of Confederation;
  - Power of national government versus the state/regional government;
  - Representation: large versus small states;
  - Slavery.

### **Lesson Evaluation**

Performance Task and/or Student Performance

The students produce paper in which they take a position on the ratification of the Constitution and support it with evidence.

Assessment Criteria for Final Project

1. Content
  - States a position for or against the ratification of the Constitution;
  - Supports with at least three pieces of evidence ;
  - Demonstrates understanding of the essential question;
  - Represents state's interests;
2. Format
3. Mechanics

Other Forms of Ongoing Assessment

1. Quizzes, tests, prompts, work samples;
2. Observations, cooperative learning dialogues, interviews, notebook;

3. Student self-assessment.

### **“Deciding which ideas to include in a Bill of Rights”**

#### **Lesson Overview**

In this lesson, students will examine a copy of twelve possible amendments to the United States Constitution as originally sent to the states for their ratification in September of 1789. Students will debate and vote on which of these amendments they would ratify and compare their resulting “Bill of Rights” to the ten amendments ratified by ten states that have since been known by this name.

#### **Objectives**

Students will:

- Analyze a document as a primary source;
- Develop persuasive arguments;
- Gain insight into the process by which the Bill of Rights came to be.

Standards Met: **B.12.1. B.12.2. B.12.3. B.12.4. B.12.6. B.12.13.**

#### **Time Required**

- One to two classes

#### **Lesson Preparation**

This lesson is meant to be an introduction to primary source analysis, but is best used with students who have a basic understanding of the Bill of Rights and the amendment process.

#### **Materials**

#### **Using the links provided by the Library of Congress:**

- [John Beckley’s copy of the Bill of Rights, 1789 as sent to the states](#) (PDF, 9.54 MB) (one assembled copy per student or per group)
- [The first ten amendments](#) to the U.S. Constitution, later known as the Bill of Rights (PDF, 245 KB) (one copy per student or per group)

#### **Lesson Procedure**

##### **Introduction**

1. Working with the entire class, discuss students’ understanding of a document. Ask the following questions to frame the discussion:
  - What is a document?
  - What are examples of common documents?
2. Distribute copies and engage students with John Beckley’s copy of the Bill of Rights 1789 as sent to the states
  - Ask students to examine the document. Possible questions include:
    - Where does your eye go first?
    - How would you describe what you’re seeing? What do you notice about the physical condition?

- Which words or phrases can you read? Has the document been altered in any way?
  - Encourage students to speculate about the document, its creator, and its context. Possible questions include:
    - Are there any indications (e.g., names, dates) of ownership or time period?
    - Who do you think wrote this?
    - What do you think this document is about? What words or phrases give clues?
    - What about language, its tone and style? Type of print?
- 3. Assign students (working in pairs or groups) specific amendments to analyze and present to their classmates for ratification.
  - Ask students to first identify unfamiliar vocabulary.
  - Encourage students to analyze the amendment's wording by making notes on a separate piece of paper.
  - Ask students to respond to the following questions on another piece of paper:
    - What is the specific right articulated in this amendment in your own words?
    - Do you think this amendment should be included in the Bill of Rights? Why or why not?

### **Extension**

- Examine the seventeen amendments in the House of Representatives' Resolution and Articles of Amendment passed on August 24, 1789. How do these seventeen amendments differ from those approved by the Senate on September 14, 1789?

### Sources Consulted:

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection. McGraw-Hill, Boston. 1998.

Primary Source Activity Worksheets:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/>

Implementation of Original Documents: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>

Analysis Tools:

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