

Hewitt Summer Institute

These lessons will explore the U.S. Constitution and conclude with students formulating an argument that answers whether or not the U.S. Constitution is democratic, if voting is essential for democracy, and if the Electoral College is democratic.

Title: Democracy in the U.S. Constitution.

Unit duration: 8-9 class periods

Grade level: 8th Grade

Objectives:

1. IWBAIT read through chosen sections of the U.S. Constitution and answer analytical questions.
2. IWBAIT read and listen to secondary sources about the U.S. Constitution and evaluate the authors' argument.
3. IWBAIT to discuss analytical questions about the U.S. Constitution through digital platforms.
4. IWBAIT listen to a podcast about the Electoral College, complete a graphic organizer, and discuss with my peers questions about the Electoral College.
5. IWBAIT orally argue my opinion on democracy in the U.S.
6. IWBAIT write a formal paragraph using M.E.A.L. to answer the following question: What do you know about the U.S. Constitution and democracy? Do you think it is democratic?

Essential Questions:

- Is the U.S. Constitution democratic?
- Is voting essential for democracy?
- What is the Electoral College and is it democratic?

Colorado State Standards, 2020:

Eighth Grade, Standard 1. History. 1. Investigate and evaluate primary and secondary sources about United States history from the American Revolution through Reconstruction to formulate and defend a point of view with textual evidence.

Eighth Grade, Standard 4. Civics. 1. Construct an understanding of the changing definition of citizenship and the expansion of rights of citizens in the United States.

Lesson content and procedures:

Note to the educator: You could start each class period with a journal entry where students individually and silently write before discussing as a class. I like to give students around 5 minutes. You know what your class needs best.

Day/time/duration	Title/content	Step by step instructions	Materials needed/notes
Day 1-2 ~50 minutes	What is Democracy?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Watch “Democracy - A Short Introduction”2. Ask the class: What is a democracy?3. Split the class into groups of 3-4.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Have students explore “American Democracy: A Great Leap Forward” and read until “A Great Leap”- Groups will choose one subheading to make a poster	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6jgWxkbR7A (Democracy - A Short Introduction, YouTube)</p> <p>https://americanhistory.si.edu/democracy-exhibition (American Democracy: A Great Leap Forward)</p>

		<p>summary. Include illustrations and quotes from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Optional) each group presents their poster to the class. 	
<p>Day 3 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>American Democracy in Question</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain to students that in the next few days you will explore different arguments about America's democracy. First a video from Vox, which argues America's democracy is broken and then a more traditional argument from an online textbook. 2. Watch "The Roots of America's Democracy Problem" by Vox. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion: What is wrong with America's democracy according to Vox. 3. Students read "What Is Democracy?" from USHistory.org. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students work either in pairs or individually and answer "What Is Democracy Guiding Questions" - Popcorn read or read as a class depending on your students. - Finish by going over answers as a class or in small groups. 	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ySL82WbcvU&t=8s (The Roots of America's Democracy Problem, YouTube)</p> <p>https://www.ushistory.org/gov/1c.asp (What Is Democracy, U.S. History.org)</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Go8BmIhfgUwDMwExn1vuDkx0y3omc47w8fbMcF461xY/edit?usp=sharing (What Is Democracy Guiding Questions)</p>
<p>Day 4 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>Understanding the U.S. Constitution</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell students today you will be unpacking the U.S. Constitution. 2. On a Smartboard (preferably) or modify depending on your school's technology, explore this Voyant tool. It will show you the most common words in the U.S. Constitution. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion on what words stick out to them, trends, things students notice. - Most common words in the US Constitution: Shall (306) States (128) President (120) United (85) 3. Open the original text of the U.S. Constitution and briefly show students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project the text on a screen in the classroom. 	<p>https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=5ac7f7f5743a1c52b1edc2de56d540cd&visible=65&view=Cirrus (Voyant tool, U.S. Constitution)</p> <p>https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/full-text (Original U.S. Constitution text)</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xdPHIyPvJqpNwLEuegt7NDcfoxtzeg5GbVAwP5KaTk/edit?usp=sharing (Outline of the U.S. Constitution)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion: Do you think you could read all this? Does the Constitution look intimidating to understand? Why? 4. Preferably on your schools LMS (like Schoology or Google Classroom) have students read through “Outline of the U.S. Constitution” - Read the questions with the students before assigning them to work on this task individually or in pairs. - Print out if necessary. - Go over questions to wrap up class. 	
<p>Day 5 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>Is the U.S Constitution Democratic?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start the class by re-asking the question “What is democracy? Do you think the U.S. is democratic?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If students struggle to come up with answers, maybe watch “Democracy - A Short Introduction” again. 2. Before this unit, you should have already taught about the Declaration of Independence. Tell students that you are going to watch a re-telling of Frederick Douglass’ speech “What to the Slave is the 4th of July” by his grand and great grandchildren. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain to students that the Declaration provides context (setting) to the Constitution. - After they watch the video students will answer this question “According to Frederick Douglass is the U.S. democratic? Why do you think yes or no?” - You could have students respond to each other on an LMS like Google Classroom. i.e. create a “Question” and instruct students to answer in at least 2 complete sentences. - Go over answers to wrap up class. 	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBe5qbnkqoM&feature=emb_title (What to the Slave is the 4th of July?, YouTube)</p>
<p>Day 6 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>Intro to the Electoral College</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask students to share what democracy means to them. 2. Class discussion: Do you know what the electoral college is? 	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj9Bs-FDaHs (How Pear Deck Works, YouTube)</p>

		<p>Have you heard someone at home or on the news talk about it? You could use the add-on Pear Deck to make your questions more interactive.</p> <p>3. Tell students that today you are going to explore what the Electoral College is and how it is related to the theme of American democracy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pass out the attached graphic organizer and tell students to fill it out as they listen. You may want to read through the graphic organizer before you begin. - Then listen to this podcast together as a class, or in groups, or individually from Civics101 called “Electoral College” - Class discussion: What is the Electoral College? - Go through and complete the organizer as a class. Maybe project the answers on the board. 	<p>https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JZSnhJus23QRJOnK9j9JfuTFNEAW-QWVODzc5FSdQU4/edit?usp=sharing (Electoral College graphic organizer)</p> <p>https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/electoralcollege (Electoral College, podcast)</p>
<p>Day 7 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>Is the Electoral College Democratic?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask the students what they remember about the Electoral College. - Ask “Does the Electoral College make every citizen’s voice equal?” “What are the pros and cons of the Electoral College” Maybe make a T- chart on the board. The teacher can write answers or students can go up and contribute. 2. Watch this video on the Electoral College called “The bad map we see every presidential election” 3. Discussion: “Can maps misrepresent how much people like or dislike a president?” 4. Read through “Voting Rights in the Constitution” excerpts from the Constitution. - Pair students up and have them look for somewhere in text that describes how citizens have the right to vote. - Discussion: “Does the text state that citizens have the right to vote?” 	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlQE4IGFc5A&feature=emb_logo (The bad map we see every presidential election, YouTube)</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oqF6G2hfewixwy34oNi5HqRsbeB2_36WMsNQUGrXA/edit?usp=sharing (Voting Rights in the Constitution, adapted from Dr. Haberman’s lecture, 2020)</p>

		<p>5. Tell students that tomorrow they are going to discuss these questions “Is the U.S. Constitution Democratic? Is voting essential for democracy? What is the Electoral College and is it democratic?”</p>	
<p>Day 8 ~50 minutes</p>	<p>Formative Assessment: The Easy Socratic Seminar</p>	<p>I got the idea for an “easy” socratic seminar from the attached blog post from “We Are Teachers.” I think at the middle school level, this can be really effective, especially if students have none or little experience with the Socratic Seminar.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have students put their desks in a circle. 2. Tell the kids they are getting a grade for their discussion: One thoughtful comment would earn them a B and two thoughtful comments would earn them an A. If at least, one person doesn’t contribute then everyone gets a zero. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post on the board the discussion guidelines/rubric - A thoughtful comment includes reasons, explanations, connections, follow-up questions, or examples. - If they disagree, they must explain why. - Grade the discussion with a class roster and make a mark every time a student made a positive contribution. 3. Go through the three questions. See where the class discussion goes. 4. Close by praising your students for their hard work! I would explain to students that historians and political scientists and politicians are constantly debating issues like these! They are doing the work of some very smart folks. 5. Start (depending on time) a Short Answer Response Question: Using all of your notes/materials. What do you know about the U.S. Constitution and democracy? Do you think it is democratic? 	<p>https://www.weareteachers.com/how-i-learned-to-stop-being-afraid-of-socratic-seminars-try-them-in-my-classes/ (“How I Learned to Stop Being Afraid of Socratic Seminars & Try Them in My Classes”, We Are Teachers)</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wjPof3xe3VItyqJyq4iqQy0KznF0ocZOyGz2JQ4c-Lk/edit?usp=sharing (Short Answer Response Question)</p>

		Explain in a 5-6 sentence paragraph.	
Day 9 ~50 minutes	Catch Up Day	1. Finish the short answer response question if needed.	

Teacher Name: Justin Manter

School: Clear Creek Middle School, Evergreen, CO

Email: justin.manter@ccsdre1.org