

Constitution and Civil Rights

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Abstract

Children will connect their experiences with larger national history by comparing classroom structure (School and classroom rules and consequences) with government structure (Constitution). Then apply the need for that structure to the power of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's. Finally, the children will look at personal responsibility in creating, maintaining, and upholding these structures.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understanding

Why do we have rules?

What is the role of the Constitution in the Civil Rights movement?

What does it mean to be a citizen?

How can I internalize and express my personal responsibility as a citizen?

Assessment

Understanding of concepts will be shown both through written worksheets and through oral participation in the classroom discussion. Personal investment will be shown in the "Low Tech Blog"

Activities

This is a two-day lesson with parts one and two taking place on day one and parts three and four taking place on day two.

Setting the Purpose

Part one asks the students to look critically at the reasons for the structures of their classroom. This gives the children a very personal purpose in the lesson.

Part 1

This part of the lesson is designed to be groundwork to help the children see the relevance of their classroom rules, but also of the Constitution. It allows for a personal connection to national issues.

1. Class discussion

Start by asking the children to list some of the class rules and/or school rules. Writing them on the board would serve to reinforce them.

Once several of them are listed, ask the question "Why do we have rules?" This is also an interesting time to write down the children's answers.

Ask the students about consequences for breaking the rules. What are they? Then follow up with “Why do we need to have consequences?” Certainly write these down so that they can be referred to on day 2. If the children haven’t gotten to the depth you want, ask the question “Would people obey the rules if there were not consequences?”

Part 2

2. Document analysis of Constitutional Amendment 13
Handout 1 (CivilRights1 Student)

There is a teacher and a student form of this handout. The teacher form helps to guide discussion and has possible answers.

Continue with the Venn diagram comparing the authority of a classroom teacher to the authority of Congress.

3. Document analysis of Constitutional Amendment 15
Handout 2 (CivilRights2 Student)

There is a teacher and a student form of this handout. The teacher form helps to guide discussion and has possible answers.

(I intentionally skipped Constitutional Amendment 14. While important, it requires too much historical background knowledge for the purposes of this lesson.)

Part 3

Day 2 Watch Oral History Clips and Link the ideas to their lives

4. Children don’t have the history to understand what life was like in the past. In order to help them understand, watch a few clips of oral history. A great web site to select from is National Visionary Leadership Project: www.visionaryproject.org

Some of my favorite clips are:

Dick Gregory: Growing up in St. Louis (starting at minute 4)

www.visionaryproject.org/gregorydick/

Norman Francis: A Lesson in Segregation (starting at minute 2)

www.visionaryproject.org/francishnorman/

Dorothy Layne McIntyre: Dealing with Racism as a Child (Just a first few moments, the essay story)

www.visionaryproject.org/mcintyredorothy/

Dorothy Layne McIntyre: Experiencing Racism in Washington D.C.

www.visionaryproject.org/mcintyredorothy/

Hand out: CivilRights3 (This handout uses the clips above. If you choose to use different clips, you will need to modify your worksheet.)

Go over hand out with the children. Two reasons for this are: many of them may need to process this with adult guidance and also to ensure depth and quality of understanding.

Part 4

5. Low Tech Blog

Dare to be a Citizen

Create a "Low Tech Blog" and seed it with a question to respond to that challenges their personal responsibility in citizenship. For Example:

- Why can't a community be strong without the active involvement of its members?
- How can diversity make a community stronger?
- I think the most important thing a citizen can do is.....?
- In my life I can fight prejudice by.....?

A suggested quote: "No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

-- [Kofi Annan](#)

* A Low Tech Blog is a way for children to write about personal ideas in a public but protected way. It is simply a file folder stuffed with lined paper. A clear page protector is stapled to the front of the folder, creating a spine that keeps the lined paper in as well. A seed question and often a though provoking quote are on the paper slipped into the page protector. Children write their response to the question, quote, and to each other on the lined pages inside the file folder. The teacher sets the expectation that every entry will be respectful even in disagreement.

Analysis of local primary sources

The local primary source that the children will be referring to will be their own classroom/school rules.

Ties to national primary sources

Students will compare the purpose of the classroom rules to the purpose of the Constitution, particularly Amendments 13 and 15. They will then take these Amendments and apply them to oral histories of African American People.

List of Sources

Websites listed above

Worksheets

CivilRights1

CivilRights2

CivilRights3

Venn Diagram

