

Constitution Day Observance

Kindergarten-8th Grade

Constitution Day (or **Citizenship Day**) recognizes the adoption of the United States Constitution and those who have become U.S. citizens. It is observed on September 17, the day the U.S.

Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution in 1787. The law establishing the present holiday was passed in 2004. Before this law was enacted, the holiday was known as "Citizenship Day". In addition to renaming the holiday "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day," the act mandates that all publicly funded educational institutions provide educational programming on the history of the American Constitution on that day.

This plan is designed to help a school participate in Constitution Day in a meaningful way, with as little disruption to the regular school day as is possible. For each grade level, kindergarten through 8th grade, a few lesson options are listed. These lessons are linked to the Minnesota Civics Standards for the grade. The lessons are appropriate for Constitution Day, dealing either with the actual document or with a Constitutional principle. Although some of the original lessons are part of larger units, they are easily adaptable to a one-day observation of the holiday. The lessons are described briefly, and then a link is given to the actual lesson. The lessons are all available through the lesson library on TeachingCivics.org.

Following the lesson suggestions are a few suggestions for all-school activities that could be part of the school day. These are simple and minimally disruptive, but allow the school community to participate in a group observation of Constitution Day.

Suggested Lessons

Kindergarten

1. Why do we have rules?

Teaching Civics through Children's Literature: No, David and David Goes to School by David Shannon – Children will enjoy these picture books about David and his misbehavior, while stimulating discussion about rules, why we have them, the penalties for breaking rules and the incentives for following them. Find the study guides at <http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/teaching-civics-through-childrens-literature/>

2. American Symbols

These activities will teach and instill a respect for the American flag, the pledge of allegiance, liberty bell, statue of liberty, the bald eagle, and other patriotic symbols. <http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/simple-symbols-and-american-children/>

Grade 1:

1. Effective Rules

This activity provides an opportunity for students to explore how rules and laws are written and interpreted. Strategies for writing a good rule/law are emphasized and scenarios examined to determine what a rule/law really means.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/no-animals-allowed-in-school/>

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Students will understand the Pledge of Allegiance and its importance as a symbol. Students will make Pledge of Allegiance picture books. They will learn the vocabulary necessary to understand the Pledge.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/the-pledge-of-allegiance/>

Grade 2:

1. Voting

Making a paper chain out of ballots allows students to easily see majority rule, their own vote in the chain, and the impact of missing votes. This is part of a collection of voting lessons created by Kids Vote. Go to page 3 for the Voting Chain.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/voting-activities-for-grades-k-2/>

2. Importance of Constitutions

In this lesson, students develop an awareness of the Constitution by exploring what it is and why it is important. Students examine their classroom rules poster as an introduction to the concept of rules and learn that the Constitution is the law of the United States.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/the-constitution-the-countrys-rules/>

Grade 3:

1. Three Branches

Students are introduced to the three functions of government (legislative, executive and judicial) through a story about an over-worked king who must handle too many tasks. Next, students are given descriptions of the functions and asked to match tasks to departments. Finally, students create job descriptions for legislators, executives and judges.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/the-tired-king/>

2. Minority Rights and Majority Rule

Teaching Civics through Children's Literature – Either *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles or *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman will lead to a discussion of minority rights and majority rule. The study guides for these books include questions to prompt conversation or to use as writing prompts.

<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/teaching-civics-through-childrens-literature/>

Grade 4:

1. People take action (2 possible lessons)
 - a. Responsibility Launcher is a fun and interactive online game that teaches students about the responsibilities of citizenship. Students will be asked to match citizens' problems with civic duties that provide solutions. The objective of the game is to help students understand how civic responsibilities empower people, improving their lives and communities.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/responsibility-launcher/>
 - b. John F. Kennedy's inaugural address inspired children and adults to see the importance of civic action and public service. His historic words challenged every American to contribute in some way to the public good. Students think about his speech and what it might mean to them in this lesson.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/ask-not-what-your-country-can-do-for-you/>
2. Government Leaders
This is an introductory lesson, giving students a basic understanding of the branches of government and the people who work there. Working with the class, create posters for each branch of government. Make separate posters for the federal and state government. On each poster include photographs of leaders and buildings that are part of that department.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/recognizing-leaders/>

Grade 5:

1. Simulated Constitutional Convention
 - a. On line Game: Travel back to 1787 and become a delegate to the convention in Philadelphia. As the Founding Fathers struggle to decide how the young nation will be governed, explore how very different men representing their states' conflicting interests created a bicameral legislature and three branches of government.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/constitutional-convention/>
 - b. Students will understand the structure and function of the United States government established by the Constitution by participating in a "Constitutional Convention" in class.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/constitutional-convention-2/>
2. Bill of Rights (3 possible lessons)
 - a. This lesson is designed to acquaint students with sections of the Bill of Rights through the use of Caldecott Medal Books and other picture books. Although originally planned for younger students, it could work well for a Constitution Day introduction.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/picture-books-and-the-bill-of-rights/>
 - b. Help restore the Bill of Rights in this online game. The Official National Computer has crashed! Your mission is to help rewrite the Bill of Rights by finding the missing rights and freedoms in the town of Freeville. <http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/bill-of-rights-game/>
 - c. Students learn about the rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and other important constitutional amendments. First they consider what rights they believe are important, then they read and analyze the real text of each amendment. This lesson also helps students analyze the impact that the Bill of Rights has on their daily lives.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/youve-got-rights/>

Grade 6:

1. Expansion of Rights – Landmark Cases
 - a. Based on *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, a landmark case about students’ right to free speech, this on-line game launches students on a journey to the U.S. Supreme Court. Along the way are mini-games and challenges that teach about the First Amendment, the Tinker case, legal concepts and how the federal courts work.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/tinker-v-des-moines/>
 - b. A story has been written on the elementary level about Linda Brown and the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The story is divided into four short “chapters,” with questions or activities provided at the end of each. All of the story may be covered in one day, or it may be broken by chapters into several days’ lessons.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/equal-treatment-a-famous-kansas-child/>
 - c. Landmark Cases is a collection of lessons regarding Supreme Court cases. For each case, the story of the events are told at three different reading levels. The lessons also include study questions and teacher notes.
<http://www.streetlaw.org/en/landmark/home>
2. Minnesota Constitution

If you’ve seen one constitution, have you seen them all? Compare and contrast the provisions of the U.S. Constitution alongside the state constitutions of Florida and Virginia. Find common ways in which state constitutions differ from (and are similar to) the U.S. Constitution, and take a closer look at your own state constitution.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/comparative-constitutions/>
For the text of the Minnesota Constitution go to:
<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/constitution/MN-Constitution.pdf>
3. How a Bill becomes Law (2 possible lessons)
 - a. An on-line game testing student knowledge of the steps for how a bill becomes law. Students compete against each other to get the most points by answering questions.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/how-a-bill-becomes-law-game/>
 - b. In this lesson, students learn the steps of a bill becoming a law and use this information to write a story about “the life of a bill.” Students then evaluate the effectiveness of our system of creating laws.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/how-a-bill-becomes-law-charting-a-path/>

Grade 7:

1. Civic Discussion on Current Event
 - a. Conversation starters are short, easily read text or images that are meant to be thought-provoking. They have been selected to illuminate issues, raise or explore areas of conflict, highlight ideas associated with each Conversation topic, and to foster conversation and ongoing dialogue. Accompanying each starter is a set of focus questions designed to open discussion about the topic and related issues.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/constitutional-conversation-starters/>
 - b. Another good resource for ideas about teaching current events in the classroom is this article – “25 Great Ideas for Teaching Current Events”
http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson072.shtml

2. Principals in the Preamble (2 possible lessons)
 - a. One important goal of civic education is to help students understand the founding documents of our democracy. For example, understanding the Preamble is critically important because it provides the vision for the government; it explains who is forming the government (We the people) and why.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/exploring-the-purposes-of-government-a-lesson-on-the-preamble/>
 - b. Students analyze the preambles to at least two state constitutions in order to identify common themes, differences and underlying values in the preambles. Then, they compare the state preambles with the preamble of the U.S. Constitution, draft a new preamble for the U.S. Constitution and provide rationales for the ideas, rights, and values it espouses. Finally, students discuss the process of amending the U.S. Constitution.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/what-does-the-preamble-of-the-u-s-constitution-mean/>

Grade 8:

1. Civic Discussion on Current Event
 - a. Conversation starters are short, easily read text or images that are meant to be thought-provoking. They have been selected to illuminate issues, raise or explore areas of conflict, highlight ideas associated with each Conversation topic, and to foster conversation and ongoing dialogue. Accompanying each starter is a set of focus questions designed to open discussion about the topic and related issues.
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 - b. Another good resource for ideas about teaching current events in the classroom is this article – “25 Great Ideas for Teaching Current Events”
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2. Contrast forms of government
 - a. This site offers very short, kid friendly definitions of types of Governments. It is a good resource for students to gain a basic understanding of the differences between Government systems. The range is wide, from Anarchy to Revolutionary Governments, to Democracy and Republic.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/kid-definitions-of-types-of-government/>
 - b. Through a PowerPoint presentation or reading, students explore several different forms of government ranging from democracy, to oligarchy, to anarchy. Students use a semantic features analysis chart to analyze the key features of each form of government. Using information from the chart, they then complete, compare, and contrast sentences. As a vocabulary review, students match vocabulary terms with their definitions using a self-assessing magic square activity. Finally, students reflect on and share their own opinions about forms of government.
<http://teachingcivics.org/lesson/who-rules/>

Suggestions for All-School Activities

1. Sign the Constitution – Post a large copy of the Constitution in a central location in the school. Beside it post large sheets of white paper. During the school day each classroom can visit the Constitution and have students sign the sheets of paper. Posters of the Constitution can be purchased at many places, or you can download a copy at <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>
2. Design posters for the Constitution Day Poster Contest! For information about this contest go to http://www.constitutionday.cc/2013_postercontest_form.pdf
3. Create a patriotic display of books, music and images for students to visit.
4. Invite speakers to visit classrooms – veterans, lawyers, police officers, fire fighters, judges – to talk with students about their civil service, their experiences with the law, or our role as citizens.
5. Have a birthday party for the Constitution – sing Happy Birthday!
6. Hold a “Recite the Preamble” contest. Give each student who can recite the Preamble correctly a pocket-size Constitution. You can purchase them in bulk from pocketconstitution.org or the National Constitution Center (among other places.)