

Writing a Classroom Constitution

Summary

Students will go through the process of writing a classroom constitution and then compare their process to that followed by the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Enduring Understanding:

Students will understand the need for law and the difficulties encountered in writing constitutions.

Essential Questions:

Why do we need laws?

How is the idea of compromise important in the writing of constitutions?

What are the purposes and roles of government?

Time Frame

1 class periods of 90 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility

Materials

Handout with preamble format for each group to fill in, butcher paper or posterboard for each group, markers, white board or chalkboard.

Background for Teachers

Before conducting this lesson, teachers should be familiar with:

Philosophy of John Locke

The concept of Natural Law

The obstacles faced by the framers of the U.S. Constitution

The purposes and role of government.

Student Prior Knowledge

An understanding of the processes and skills necessary to work productively in groups.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to identify the need for law in their everyday lives and in the workings of government. Students will understand the processes and difficulties faced by the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Instructional Procedures

Introductory Activity:

Play the "Paper Clip" game. [Paper Clip Game](#)

Debrief on why having rules is better for the group than not having rules.

What were their frustrations while playing the game? Explain the Rule of Law. Was this rule applied while playing the game? Did that lead to frustration? Why?

Explain to the students that they will be writing a classroom constitution based on the Rule of

Law and using a process similar to that followed by the delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention.

Writing the Constitution:

Have the students, in small groups of three to five students, complete a preamble for the classroom constitution.

Use the following or a similar format.

"We the Students of _____'s class, in order to _____, _____, and _____ do hereby ordain and establish this constitution based on the principles of _____ (noun), _____ (noun) and _____ (noun)."

Meet as a class in order to discuss the different groups' versions of the preamble. Decide as a class how the preamble will be written. Write the final version on a large piece of butcher paper or the board so that it can be easily seen.

Have the students go back into their groups to discuss the answers to the questions below and then decide on **three to five** important classroom rules. Have each group choose someone to record their proposed rules on butcher paper and someone to present those rules to the rest of the class when you come back together.

Tell the groups to answer these questions *before* they write their rules (post the questions on a chart or overhead for all groups to see):

What is respect? How can we create an atmosphere of respect?

What are our responsibilities as students?

What is our teacher's responsibility to us?

What are our rights in the classroom? What are our teacher's rights?

Tell groups to answer these questions *after* writing their proposed rules.

Do our proposed rules fit under the guidelines of school and district rules?

Will each rule agreed on be fair to all class members?

Do our rules pass the "Good Rules" test (developed by the Ohio State Bar Association and the Cleveland public schools)?

Are they: - Said simply? - Easy to follow? - Enforceable? - Not in conflict with other rules?

Come back together as a class. Have the spokesman for each group post the chart with their group's proposed rules so that everyone can see it. Then have them read their rules to the class and answer any questions about those rules that class members might have. Do not allow students to debate the value or usefulness of the rules at this point.

Ask the class if they can agree on one set of rules to adopt as presented for the class. If so, great. If not (and this is much more likely) tell them that now you will lead them in a discussion to come up with a compromise document. Conduct this discussion as a class. Once you have decided on the three to five rules that will be in place for your class, vote on them as a class by calling for a "yeah" or "nay" from each person. If there is a 2/3 majority, the rules become your new class constitution. But wait, you're not quite done yet...

Now ask the class how the constitution for your class may be changed in the future, if the need should arise. Add this provision to your constitution. Also, you may want to remember the importance of your veto power as teacher. Can you veto changes? Can your veto be overridden? These are questions for you to answer.

Offer the students the opportunity for one of them to earn extra credit by writing up your classroom constitution nicely on a piece of poster-board or butcher paper. You may even want them to use calligraphy to do so.

As an assessment, have students write a short paper commenting on their experiences writing

a classroom constitution. Have them consider questions such as:

Was this process easier or more difficult than you expected? Why do you think so?

What did you enjoy about the process? What did you dislike?

Do you think that the process was a fair one? Why or why not?

What do you think could have been done to make the process fairer than it was?

Were you satisfied with the final provisions of the classroom constitution? Why or why not?

Finally (and don't leave this part out!): Compare and contrast our experiences with those of the framers who wrote the United States Constitution. How were they the same? How were they different?

Extensions

This lesson is part of a suggested unit plan to cover standard 6210-01 of the United States Government and Citizenship core. The suggested components of this lesson are the Survival lesson, the Philosophers board game, the Constitutional Convention and this lesson on writing a classroom constitution.

Assessment Plan

Students will compose a classroom constitution which will be posted in the classroom and followed by the class throughout the year.

Students will write a short paper answering questions about the process they followed and how it compares to that followed by the delegates to the U.S. Constitutional convention.

Rubrics

[Social Studies Analytical Essay](#)

Bibliography

<http://www.ofcn.org/cyber.serv/academy/ace/soc/cecsst/cecsst147.html>

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/lesson-plans/lesson-2177.html>

Authors

[MARY MOULTON](#)

[JANET SANDERS](#)