Civics Inquiry
Lesson Plans

Who Are We the People?

Lesson Overview

Suggested Grade Level(s)	Middle School	**Time Required for the Lesson**	Two-day lesson, including one summative assessment

Alignments

We the People (Level 2)

- Lesson 25: How Has the Right to Vote Expanded Since the Constitution Was Adopted?

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

- **D2.Civ.8.6-8.** Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- **D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

Educating for American Democracy Roadmap

Theme 1: Civic Participation

- History Driving Questions: What forms does civic participation take? Who has access to different forms of participation, and how has that access changed over time?

Theme 4: A New Government & Constitution

- History Driving Questions: How did debates about the new U.S. government play out among those who were not formally incorporated in decision-making?

Civic Skills & Dispositions

- Commitment to justice
- Equality, and fairness
- Concern for the welfare of others
- Civility
- Social responsibility

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Focus

Students will develop their responsible decision-making by identifying problems and analyzing situations with regard to the ways our Constitution has evolved and will practice ethical responsibility in identifying citizen groups that still lack representation in "We the People."

Lesson Overview

Lesson Objective	Lesson Assessments
• Identify which citizen groups were denied representation in the Constitution. • Explain how the Constitution has evolved in its representation of citizen groups. • Defend their position on whether all citizens are recognized in We the People.	• Students demonstrate their understanding of ways our Constitution has evolved by defending their position on whether all citizens are recognized in "We the People" via a social media post. --- • Teachers may assess by using the Assessment Rubric. • Students will participate in self-reflection by completing the Inquiry Reflection Tool.

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Compelling Question

- Are all people recognized in "We the People?"

Supporting Question(s)

- SQ1: Who has been denied representation in “We the People?”
- SQ2: How has the Constitution evolved in representing “We the People?”

Texts / Materials

Day 1

- Powerful Messages (slide deck)
- We the People (video)
- We the People Mind Map
- Denied Representation Resource Bank
- Constitutionally Denied

Day 2

- Impact of Evolving Rights (graphic organizer)
- Evolving Voting Rights Timeline
- Recognizing We the People (template)
- Assessment Rubric
- Inquiry Reflection Tool

Vocabulary

- **consent of the governed:** The idea that a government's legitimacy and power is justified and lawful only when agreed to by the people over which that political power is exercised
- **disenfranchise:** To deny or withhold someone’s right to vote
- **general welfare:** A government acts for the common good to improve society for the benefit of all of its members
- **popular sovereignty:** Government based on consent of the people
- **suffrage:** The right to vote in political elections

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Teacher Background

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. said, "The provisions of the Constitution are not mathematical formulas having their essence in their form; they are organic, living institutions transplanted from English soil. Their significance is vital, not formal; it is to be gathered not simply by taking the words and a dictionary, but by considering their origin and the line of their growth." Today, we often refer to that sentiment in that the Constitution is a living document, open to reinterpretation as it evolves and adapts to new circumstances. Written in 1787, the Constitution has only been amended 27 times in those 230-plus years. However, that's not to say the document the Framers created was perfect by all accounts. Its most glaring errors are in its omission of recognizing all citizens and its failure to halt the institution of slavery.

In this lesson, students will examine how the definition of "We the People" has evolved over 230-plus years of this grand experiment of democracy. Before the start of the lesson, teachers should familiarize themselves with the primary and secondary sources featured on the students' Denied Representation Resource Bank.

Teachers can find additional background support resources as follows:

- Voting, Elections, and Representation, Part 31: Voting, Registration, and Participation – 60 Second Civics
- Voting and Elections – Center for Civic Education
- We the People | CONSTITUTION USA with Peter Sagal – PBS
- The U.S. Constitution: Preamble – United States Courts

This lesson contains material about racism, sexism and voter suppression that some students might find offensive or potentially traumatizing. This material has been included to give students the knowledge to identify voter suppression and other obstacles some citizens face. A culturally responsive classroom will provide a welcoming and safe environment where students feel comfortable discussing difficult topics. Ensure students feel comfortable sharing appropriate personal perspectives. Consider establishing classroom norms that encourage discussion.

Lesson Plan

Day 1

Engage: Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Greet students upon entry to the classroom and welcome them to social studies.
2. Facilitate a class discussion, asking students what words, phrases, or symbols they think represent American democracy.
3. Capture student responses on an anchor chart.
4. Using your routine strategy for setting up groups, divide the class into small groups of approximately three students each.
5. Tell students we will examine several phrases that deliver important and powerful messages about America's democratic system.
6. Share the Powerful Messages slide deck.
7. Display slide 2 and ask students to identify from where they recognize this powerful message.
8. Display slide 3 to reveal the source of this quote.
9. Repeat this pattern with slides 4–9.
10. Facilitate a brief discussion on how these phrases have shaped our ideals of American democracy, which may include topics such as the following:
    - Voting rights
    - Informed citizens
    - Equal protection
    - Serving the greater good

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (UDL)

- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Consider allowing students trio time to formulate answers.
- Consider asking student volunteers to rephrase each quote as needed.
- Students could be encouraged to volunteer responses in full-group format or to jot answers in a social studies notebook.

English Language Learners (ELL)

- The powerful message quotes could be translated into the native language of the student(s) or provided as an audio file as needed.

Day 1

Explore: Guided/Open Inquiry

1. Tell students that we are beginning a new inquiry lesson today by taking a deep dive into the meaning of "We the People."
2. Display and introduce the compelling question: "Are all people recognized in 'We the People'?"
3. Ask students to declare their stance on this compelling question using a secret ballot. Responses could be collected via Google Forms, Survey Monkey, handwritten sticky notes, or simple paper ballots.
4. Allow time to share several responses, if desired.
5. Tell students you will revisit this question at the end of the inquiry lesson.
6. Play the We the People video.
7. As they watch, direct students to use the We the People Mind Map to collect evidence and examples of the meaning of "We the People."
8. Play the video a second time, pausing for lesson vocabulary to support video comprehension as needed.

Culturally Responsive Supports

UDL

- Desks arranged in tables/clusters are recommended to facilitate better student collaboration.
- Ask a student to rephrase the compelling question for the class.
- Consider allowing students to utilize a speak-to-type feature to record their answers on the graphic organizer.
- Prompt students to draw sketches to illustrate ideas, topics, or items as an alternative option.
- Utilize the subtitles/closed captions or show the transcript function if viewing the video via YouTube.

ELL

- Explore subtitle options to change the language if viewing the video via YouTube.
- Provide the compelling question translated into the native language of students, as needed.
- Provide vocabulary translated into the native language of students, as needed.

Extension

- Students may add additional bubbles to the mind map if time allows.

Day 1

Explain: Discuss and Share

1. Bring students back together as a full group.
2. Use your preferred strategy for students to briefly share their We the People Mind Map.
3. Pose today's supporting question to students: "Who has been denied representation in 'We the People'?"
4. Guide students in a discussion to name the four groups identified in the video who were originally disenfranchised. Answers should include women, indigenous people, enslaved people, and landless men.
5. Allow time for students to share thoughts and ask relevant questions.

Culturally Responsive Supports

UDL

- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Ask a student to rephrase the supporting question for the class.

ELL

- Provide the supporting question translated into the native language of students as needed.

Day 1

Elaborate: Apply New Learning

1. Assign students to one of three investigation groups: women, indigenous people, or enslaved people of African descent.
2. Tell students we will now explore how certain groups were denied rights when the Constitution was ratified by conducting an investigation using primary and secondary sources found on the Denied Representation Resource Bank.
3. Students will utilize the Constitutionally Denied graphic organizer to collect evidence as they investigate their assigned topic.
4. Preview the Constitutionally Denied graphic organizer together to ensure students understand the purpose and expectations.
5. Direct students to take their time to examine each resource in their assigned investigation.
6. Provide students with ample time to explore their assigned investigation. Note that many sources include video/audio clips, so student headphone use is ideal.
7. Encourage students to collaborate with other students assigned to their topic as they conduct their investigations.
8. Circulate the room, encouraging each group, observing progress, and redirecting as needed.
9. Return class to full-group format to allow representatives from each citizen group to briefly share with the class.
10. Briefly discuss key actions students discovered in each of the investigations. Discussion questions may include the following:
    - In what ways were citizens disenfranchised?
    - What did the citizen groups have in common?
    - How were the citizen groups different?
    - In what ways did citizen groups demand their rights?

Culturally Responsive Supports

UDL

- The teacher may wish to model how to conduct the primary/secondary source investigation with one of the three topics.
- Utilize the subtitles/closed captions feature if needed (when viewing through the YouTube platform).
- Consider allowing students to utilize a speak-to-type feature to record their answers on the graphic organizer.
- Utilize a text-reader function when needed.

ELL

- Explore subtitle options to change the language if viewing the video via YouTube.
- Provide the compelling question translated into the native language of students, as needed.
- Provide vocabulary translated into the native language of students, as needed.

Extension

- If time allows, students could explore one of the other two investigations.

Lesson Plan

Day 2

Elaborate: Apply New Learning

1. The suggested group arrangement for this activity is groups of three, featuring one student expert to represent each of the three citizen groups explored in the previous lesson—women, indigenous people, and people of African descent.
2. Tell students that we will continue our inquiry in examining the meaning of "We the People."
3. Display today's supporting question: "How has the Constitution evolved in its representation of 'We the People'?"
4. Ask students to share their initial responses to this question.
5. Consider recording answers on an anchor chart.
6. Tell students we will now explore how voting rights have evolved for the three citizen groups we investigated in the previous lesson—women, indigenous people, and people of African descent.
7. Students will utilize the Impact of Evolving Rights graphic organizer to collect evidence as they examine the Evolving Voting Rights Timeline.
8. Preview the Impact of Evolving Rights graphic organizer together to ensure students understand the purpose and expectations.
9. Encourage students to serve as the experts for their assigned citizen group.
10. Direct students to take their time to examine each governmental action on the timeline. Students may refer to their completed Constitutionally Denied graphic organizer or the Denied Representation Resource Bank for additional support as needed.
11. Give students ample time to explore the timeline as a group.

Culturally Responsive Supports

UDL

- The teacher may wish to model how to evaluate the evolving rights by completing the graphic organizer for one of the governmental actions.
- Consider allowing students to utilize a speak-to-type feature to record their answers on the graphic organizer.
- Utilize a text-reader function when needed.

ELL

- Provide the graphic organizer translated into the native language of students as needed.
- Translate the timeline to the native language of students as needed.
- Provide class discussion questions translated into the native language of students in advance as needed.

Day 2

Elaborate: Apply New Learning (continued)	Culturally Responsive Supports

12. Circulate the room, encouraging each group, observing progress, and redirecting as needed.
13. Return class to full-group format to review the Impact of Evolving Rights graphic organizer by conducting a class discussion which may include the following questions:
    - Which governmental actions expanded voting rights?
    - Which governmental actions denied voting rights?
    - What limitations did each action have?
    - Which branches of government were involved in these actions?
    - What commonalities did you find in the governmental actions?
    - What differences did you find in each governmental action?
    - Is there still room for evolving the definition of "We the People?"

Day 2

Evaluate: Assess and Authentically Engage

1. Congratulate the young scholars on conducting this inquiry investigation.
2. Ask students our compelling question: "Are all people recognized in 'We the People'?"
3. Remind students that we voted on this question the previous day. Encourage students to self-reflect to determine if their vote has changed.
4. To answer the compelling question, students will create a social media post using the Recognizing We the People template.
5. If time allows, display completed Recognizing We the People posts and conduct a gallery walk, allowing students to observe each others' claims and justifications.
6. Consider utilizing the Inquiry Reflection Tool for student self-reflection.

Culturally Responsive Supports

UDL

- The teacher may provide examples of social media posts for reference.
- The teacher may wish to model how to use the assessment tool.

ELL

- Utilize a text-reader function when needed.
- Allow students to translate the social media post into their native language.

Extension

- If time allows, students could investigate which citizen groups are not represented in "We the People."