TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
NEWSLETTER: FEBRUARY 2017

WELCOME!

Teaching with Primary Sources—Middle Tennessee State University, administered by the Center for Historic Preservation, engages learners of all ages in using primary sources to explore major issues and questions in many different disciplines.

Contact: Stacey Graham or Kira Duke at (615) 898-2947 or www.mtsu.edu/tps

NEWS

• Are you interested in learning more about incorporating local history and primary sources into your curriculum? TPS-MTSU will be presenting a session at the Bringing It Home conference at North Alabama Community College on Friday, March 3rd.

• Check out our newest lesson plan written by Mark Scott, who teaches at Bellevue Middle School, Shelby County Schools. The lesson plan was featured in our November workshop Yellow Fever in Memphis: Teaching How Disease Impacted the City and explores how the city rebuilt itself into a modern city after the epidemic.

• TPS-MTSU will be in Brownsville on April 7th for “Strategies for Using Text Sources” and Memphis on April 8th for “Defining Citizenship.” Email Kira for more details.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

With the recent peaceful transition of power that is a United States presidential inauguration, Americans have been thinking more and more about the role of government in citizens’ lives, as well as the role of citizens in the operations of the government. Knowing how best to participate in public life is what “civics” is all about, and students will need a good sense of this if they are to become fully participating and responsible citizens.

This month, we explore the issues of checks & balances, the media, and federalism. This newsletter is just the latest of our efforts to speak to civics and government education: for more, see previous newsletters on voting rights, civil liberties, founding documents, women’s suffrage, political science, civil rights, and elections.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

• February 17 (Murfreesboro) - “Defining Citizenship: Strategies for Teaching Civics with Primary Sources” at the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, email Kira Duke.

• February 23 (Nashville) - “Strategies for Finding and Using Primary Sources in Elementary Grades” at the Martin Professional Development Center from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for Metro Nashville teachers in grades 2 to 5.

• March 10 (Gatlinburg) - Tennessee Council for Social Studies Conference sessions: “Building Historical and Critical Thinking Skills in an Age of Fake News” and “Using Primary Sources in a Group Project Setting” at the Park Vista Hotel. For more information on the conference, click here.

• March 11 (Knoxville) - “Strategies for Using Text-Based Sources in the Elementary Classroom” at the East Tennessee History Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. ET. To register, email Lisa Oakley.

THEME: CIVIC EDUCATION

[Alderman Edward Vrdolyak (standing, center) gesturing during a meeting of the Chicago City Council [1983]]

An important part of civic involvement is serving the local community on the city council or as a school board member. For information on requirements for elected officials in Tennessee, follow this link.

Content created and featured in partnership with the TPS program does not indicate an endorsement by the Library of Congress.
LESSON IDEA—CHECKS AND BALANCES

TPS-MTSU has just published a new lesson plan on Federalist No. 10 and the dangers of factionalism. Now we turn to the other essay from The Federalist Papers highlighted by the curriculum standards, Federalist No. 51. In this essay, the author (James Madison or Alexander Hamilton) discusses the separation of powers among different branches of government, and how the independence of these branches from each other creates a system of checks and balances. He goes on to say that the larger and more diverse the republic (by which he means the people of the United States), the more likely that diverse interests will serve as checks on each other, making the majority of any one interest less likely.

This is a complex document that argues impressively for one of the most cherished aspects of U.S. government. First, introduce the context of The Federalist Papers to students with this video. You may also wish to have them read this short Today in History article for additional background. Then, pass out this worksheet, which takes one excerpt from Federalist No. 51 and challenges students to do a close reading of it. Tell students to first read the excerpt in the box once over without answering any questions. They can underline words or phrases that they want to define and then work to supply definitions or synonyms. Once they are a bit more comfortable with the vocabulary, then have them read the passage for meaning. They should answer all the questions to the right of the excerpt, either on the sheet or on a separate sheet of paper.

This lesson idea meets state standards for 8th grade Social Studies (8.32), high school U.S. Government and Civics (GC.6), and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).

LESSON IDEA—THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA

When you think of civic education, you may think of the different branches of government, the powers they possess, or the way that representatives are elected. Though all of these are important, a crucial part of civic education is understanding the influences that the media exert on our political process. By looking at historic and contemporary examples of media, students can identify the role the press plays in our politics and discover its biases, messages, and purposes.

Before starting, it might be helpful to do some research into what the founding fathers said about the role of the press in politics. You can have your students do some independent research or read these essays from George Washington’s Mount Vernon or Time For Kids. Ask your students some of the following questions. What did the founding fathers say about the press? What contradictions are evident? In what ways does this surprise you? Were there differences between the founding fathers regarding the press? What was the nature of those differences?

After setting up the background information, divide the students up into groups. Assign the groups the following primary sources with a primary source analysis sheet: Pursuit of Nixon Scandals, Hail Columbia, Fall is Flayed for Leasing of Navy Oil Lands, and A National Appeal in Support of the Re-Election of President Grant. Ask some of the following questions: What type of source is this? Where is the source from? Who is the author of the source? What event or person is the source covering? Is the source favorable toward that event/person? Why or why not? In what ways is the source convincing? What could the source do to better communicate its message? Then have students look up contemporary media coverage, compare them with historic examples, and comment on any differences or similarities they may see. The sources used for this lesson idea are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of sources that could be used. For more resources, see Presidential Campaign Posters, American Time Capsule, Presidential Campaign Songs, or Chronicling America.

This lesson idea meets state standards for high school U.S. Government and Civics (GC.32, 33, and 34).
Lesson Idea—Federalism

The division of power between the federal government and state governments has been a debated issue throughout our nation’s history. Federalism, which is the sharing of power between federal and state governments, is a central theme within the U.S. Constitution. The concept of federalism developed out of the problems that arose under the Articles of Confederation. In the nation’s early years, it became apparent that a stronger federal government would be needed to unite the states and keep the nation from breaking apart.

In this lesson idea, students will examine specific sections of the U.S. Constitution to determine what powers are granted to the federal government as well as what powers are granted to the states. To begin, review the concept of federalism and ask students to share what they know about federal versus state powers. Next, divide up Article I, Section 8 and hand out to your class. Ask your students to read their excerpts to determine what powers are granted to the legislative branch. Have them share their findings and compile a list for all the class to see. Then, have your groups analyze Article I, Section 10; Article II, Section 2; and Article III, Section 2. What do each of these sections tell us about the division of powers? What powers are granted to the executive and judicial branches? What are states forbidden from doing? Add each group’s findings to your class list. Groups will then read Article IV; Article V; and Article VI, Section 2. What rights are guaranteed to the states? How is power being shared and divided within these sections? Add each group’s findings to the class list. Ask your students to reflect on their findings. What role does federalism play in how our government—both at the federal and state levels—functions?

Finally, have students read Amendment 10 of the Bill of Rights. Why was this amendment important? What powers do states have? You might have your students research the state constitution to help them answer this question.

This lesson idea meets state standards for 8th grade Social Studies (8.33), high school U.S. Government and Civics (GC.6) and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).

Featured Feature—Congress.gov

Part of civic education is knowing what your government representatives actually do in order to represent you. What do they do when they gather in the House or Senate chambers? What does the lawmaking process look like? You can find out at Congress.gov—the Library’s Web site for bills that have been introduced in recent decades, for detailed information on all members of Congress (both in the House and Senate), and for the goings-on of Congress in general. Moreover, you can be confident that the information you find on this site is the most authoritative that you could find, since it is “the official website for U.S. federal legislative information” (from the About page).

Educators can find classroom resources at Congress.gov, including nine brief videos that take you through the steps of the legislative process, as well as lesson plans and links to resources on founding documents.

You can even find out who your Senators and Congressmen and women are, and, with a few clicks of your mouse, find out their phone numbers so that you can contact them with your comments and concerns.

Please note: The legislation covered on this site only stretches back forty years, at most. For legislation from 1774 to 1875, go to A Century of Lawmaking.
Local Court Houses

County court house, Knoxville, Tenn. [between 1900 and 1910]

Your local courthouse is the epicenter for local government in the community. What is the responsibility of local government? What government business is conducted in your local courthouse? Where is your courthouse located? Why do you think it is located there? How does the building compare with others in your community?

Libraries in Civic Education

Public Library Week [ca. 1936]

Local libraries played an important role in social, education, and cultural life during the Great Depression and the years leading up to World War II. Have the students identify the closest library, and discuss the value of having free access to books and other materials.

Protests as Civic Involvement

"Tea destroyed by Indians" [1773]

A crucial part of civic education is the exchange between the people and their governing body. One of the most notable forms of exchange between people and the government has been protests. The Boston Tea Party is only one example of citizens protesting for what they believe in; discuss with your students other influential protests, such as the women’s suffrage movement.

Justice Selection

Supreme Court Justice [between 1873 and 1916]

The Supreme Court is the highest law of the land. Justices on the Supreme Court have the power to decide if something is or is not constitutional. Have your students examine the responsibilities of a justice. What is the process of justice selection? How long do they serve? Can a justice be removed? Where in the Constitution are their powers laid out? Would you change their selection process and tenure? If so, how would you change it?