TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
NEWSLETTER: FEBRUARY 2014

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.

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NEWS

• Do you teach about Tennessee as a frontier state and the early years of statehood? If so, join us on March 14th at the Historic Travellers Rest Plantation and Museum in Nashville for a day exploring this topic. The workshop will include a tour of the house and portions of the grounds. To register, email Kira Duke.

• We are partnering with the TN State Library and Archives to conduct a workshop in conjunction with the War of 1812 Bicentennial on March 21 (the symposium is on March 22) at Lincoln County High School. To register, email Stacey Graham.

• Mark your calendars for this summer’s Civil War Institute! From June 17-19, we will be exploring the theme “A Soldier’s Life.” The institute will spend two class days in Murfreesboro and the other day will be spent visiting middle Tennessee Civil War sites. Registration for the institute will open in March.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

• February 5—(Nashville) “Intersections of Black and Latin Americas: Many Movements, One People” Workshop in partnership with Vanderbilt Center for Latin American Studies from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, click here.

• February 15—(Nashville) “Slaves and Slaveholders: Using Content and Core Strategies to Teach about Slavery in Tennessee” Workshop in partnership with the Tennessee State Museum from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, click here for info.

• February 25 & 26—(Knoxville) “Founding Documents” Workshop at the East Tennessee History Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Participants must attend both days. To register, email Lisa Oakley.

• March 7—(Gatlinburg) “Breaking Ground in Civil Disobedience: The National Woman’s Party” and “Multiple Perspectives in the Age of Exploration” at Tennessee Council for Social Studies Conference. Session times 1:45 p.m. and 2:45 p.m.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Photograph of Archibald MacLeish, the Marquess of Lothian, and the Magna Carta, November 28, 1939.

Why was the Magna Carta placed for safekeeping in the Library of Congress in 1939?

THEME: FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

Most Americans agree that the so-called “Founding Documents” are of the utmost significance in American history, even though some people may disagree on how to interpret them. But what are the “Founding Documents”? The three documents that first come to mind are the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights—called the “Charters of Freedom” by the National Archives. In its Creating the United States exhibition, the Library of Congress has ample resources that illustrate how these documents were “forged out of insight, invention, and creativity.” The Library also has resources on several other works that contributed to the founding of the U.S., such as in the collection Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789 or in the resource guide American Founders.

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

A native of England, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) wrote one of the most influential pamphlets of the Revolutionary period just over a year after he emigrated to Philadelphia. Common Sense (1776), which Paine published anonymously, set forth in blunt language rational arguments in favor of American independence from Great Britain. The pamphlet contained several key concepts later reflected in the Declaration of Independence, including the ideas that all men are created equal, that government depends on the consent of the governed, and that King George III had committed a series of abuses that justified revolution.

Common Sense quickly became a best-seller. By the end of the year, twenty-five editions had appeared and more than a half million copies had sold. Part of the success of Common Sense resulted from its forthright, engaging prose. Ask half of your class to read the second paragraph on this page and the other half to read the middle paragraph on this page (remind students that a lower-case “s” often appears as an “f”). Ask students to summarize the arguments being made and to analyze the language Paine used to make his arguments. Pamphlets like Common Sense would have been read aloud in pubs and coffee houses, so ask for volunteers to read these selections aloud. Does Paine’s language remain persuasive today?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet curriculum standards for grade 8 Social Studies (Development of a New Nation, 1720-1787), high school U.S. Government, and CCSS for English/Language Arts, grades 8-12 (Reading: Informational Text, Literacy in History/Social Studies).

LESSON IDEA—THE MAGNA CHARTA

In 1215, English barons forced King John to agree to a bill of rights that greatly limited arbitrary royal power and confirmed the traditional liberties of the landowning class. This Magna Charta ("great charter," also spelled Carta) is one of the most influential documents in the history of western democratic government. Its influence on the American Bill of Rights is beyond question, though some Americans at the time did not support the need for such a document.

What sorts of rights do your students expect to find in the Magna Charta? For background, have students read a brief introduction (for grades 7-8) or a longer chapter (for high school) from the National Archives Web site. Even though the Magna Charta was soon annulled and it only pertained to a small portion of the population, why has it remained so influential over the centuries? Next, have students read a version from 1297, with each student or pair of students tackling one or two sections. Explain, in oral or written format, what each section means and any connections it may have to the U.S. Constitution. (For example, #29 refers to due process, which is enshrined in Amendments #5 and #14.)

For advanced students: Read the statements of supporters and detractors of adopting a Magna Charta-style bill of rights in the U.S. in the blog entry, “On Despising English Liberties and Other Wisdom from the Founders.” How would a bill of rights have different implications for 1700s America that it did for 1200s England? In other words, how does a document like this make a statement about who has the power to bestow rights?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet curriculum standards for grade 7 Social Studies (Middle Ages in Western Europe, 400 A.D./C.E. to 1500s), grade 8 Social Studies (The Constitution and Foundation of the American Political System, 1777-1789), high school U.S. Government (Principles of United States Government), as well as CCSS for English/Language Arts in grades 8-12 (Reading: Informational Text, Literacy in History/Social Studies).
Lesson Idea—The Federalist

Beginning in October 1787, the Federalist, later known as the Federalist Papers, was published in two New York newspapers. This series of articles written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, who published using pseudonyms, sought to address many of the criticisms of the new constitution and ease the way for ratification. A total of eighty-five articles were written in less than two years with seventy-seven published serially. The volume and eloquent arguments contained with each made it nearly impossible for the opposition to refute or debate any of the claims contained within the individual articles. In total, the Federalist Papers provide a unique insight into the reasoning behind how our Constitution is structured.

Begin by having students read Federalist #10. Depending on the reading level of your students, you may want to excerpt portions of this document or break it into smaller passages and do a jigsaw with students. Once students have completed their first reading of the document, ask them what words or phrases they had difficulty with. You may ask them to circle unfamiliar words as they are reading. Have students briefly summarize what they read in three bullet points.

Next pose the following questions to students: What is the danger of factions? Why is a pure democracy not a desirable form of government? How can a republic address the issues of factionalism? Ask students to reread the article with those questions in mind. As they read, have them underline portions of the text that address each of the questions. On a separate sheet of paper, ask students to answer each of the questions citing portions of their underlined text. In a class discussion, ask what criticism this article was trying to address. Based on how our government currently operates, were the authors correct in their assertions?

This lesson can be adapted to meet curriculum standards in 8th grade Social Studies (8.31) and high school U.S. Government (GC. 6) as well as CCSS for English/Language Arts in grade 8-12 (Reading: Informational Text and Writing).

Lesson Idea—The Articles of Confederation

The Constitution we know today was not the United States’s first attempt at forming a central government. At the same time the Declaration of Independence was being written, the Continental Congress created another committee to write a constitution for the new nation. The congress saw the committee’s first draft on July 12, 1776, but did not approve the new Articles of Confederation until more than a year later, on November 15, 1777. At that point, the Articles still had to be ratified by each state. Eight states ratified on July 9, 1778, but the others were less agreeable. It took until March 1781 before Maryland became the final state to ratify.

The Articles of Confederation created a relatively weak federal government. There was no Senate, and no executive branch or Supreme Court. This congress could not even collect taxes! It quickly became apparent that the Articles were inadequate to the United States’s needs, and a Constitutional Convention was held in 1787 to begin to address the problems.

Though the Articles allowed Congress to govern during the Revolutionary War and accomplish several other goals, its weaknesses created a number of problems. James Madison described these weaknesses as the “Vices of the Political System of the U. States” in March 1787 (see a transcription here). The language of Madison’s document is very difficult. Either as a class or, with more advanced students, in small groups, read Madison’s list of “vices.” Work to identify the key idea of each section and create a list of Madison’s major complaints. Were these issues eventually addressed by the Constitution? How?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet curriculum standards for grade 8 Social Studies (The Constitution and Foundation of the American Political System, 1777-1789) and CCSS for English/Language Arts in grade 8 (Reading: Informational Text, Literacy in History/Social Studies).
UPDATING THE DECLARATION

Paul Stahr. "1776—Retouching an Old Masterpiece—1915," Cover illustration from Life, July 1915. [Detail; scroll down to fifth document.]

Discuss the contrast between the portrayal of the woman and the image of the Revolutionary patriot (probably Thomas Jefferson). How would you describe their features and attitudes? What events and movements were taking place in the 1910s that likely prompted this illustration?

JOHN LOCKE

John Locke. Two Treatises of Government... The Latter is an Essay Concerning the True, Original Extent, and the End of Civil Government. [1690]

How did Locke’s work influence Thomas Jefferson’s writing of the Declaration of Independence? What other early American leaders cited Locke’s work as an influence?

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must nevertheless be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions. Indeed, it is in this same point of view that the inhabitants of the United States themselves look upon religious belief. I do not know whether all the Americans have a sincere faith in their religion; for who can search the human heart? but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. This

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, Alexis de Tocqueville, Translated by Henry Reeve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835) [p. 232]

Alexis de Tocqueville was a French citizen who traveled extensively throughout America in the 1830s and wrote the classic Democracy in America based on his observations. He was very interested in all of America’s social and political practices and institutions. He wrote the above observations on religion in the early 1830s. What was going on with American religion at that time that might have colored his interpretation?

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Convention at Philadelphia, 1787 [1823; detail]

This illustration from the cover of a 1823 history of the United States depicts George Washington addressing the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. A similar illustration from several decades later emphasizes Benjamin Franklin’s role. Why did these artists choose Washington and Franklin as their primary subjects over other key architects of the Constitution? How do you think drawings like these influenced later generations’ understanding of this event?