Common Core Social Studies Learning Plan Template

**Lesson Title:** Constructing a Complex Definition of “Constitution”

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**Appropriate for Grade Level(s):** 12th Grade – U.S. Government and Politics

**History Standard(s)/Applicable CCSS(s) (RI, W, S&L, L):**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/2/) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/4/) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/10/) By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2b](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/11-12/2/b/) Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2d](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/11-12/2/d/) Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic; convey a knowledgeable stance in a style that responds to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.

Nevada State Standards

*C13.[9-12].9* Interpret the symbols and documents of a nation and analyze how they represent its identity.

*C13.[9-12].2* Analyze major conflicts in social, political, and economic life and evaluate the role of compro­mise in the reso­lution of these issues.

Nevada Skills Standards

Read texts by using reading strategies (i.e., prior knowledge, identify key vocabulary words, context clues, main ideas, supporting details, and text features: pictures, maps, text boxes).

Read for a specific purpose (i.e., detect cause & effect relationships, compare & contrast information, identify fact v. opinion, and author bias).

**Type of Lesson:** Context Definition

**Student Readings (list):** “A Machine That Would Go of Itself” by Michael Kammen. Excerpted.

**Total Time Needed:** 90 minute class period OR two 45 minute class segments

**Lesson Outline:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time Frame****(e.g. 15 minutes)** | **What is the teacher doing?**  | **What are students doing?** |
| 3 minutes | Hand out Concept Definition Assessment Page. Ask students to write down a definition of Constitution on the lines labeled Pre-assessment. | Students are writing down their understanding of the word Constitution. |
| 15-20 minutes | Distribute copies of the both the Constitution Context Definition Student Handout and the excerpted reading, “A Machine That Would Go Of Itself” and direct students to read the entire reading. | Skimming the entire reading to gain a basic understanding of the author’s idea. |
| 5 minutes | Instruct students to go back through the reading and highlight all versions of the word Constitution as they appear in the text. | Highlighting each appearance of the word or a version of the word Constitution in the reading. |
| 15-20 minutes | Show students the grid on the top of the first page of the handout. Direct students to work in groups. Explain to students they need to determine what the author is directly and indirectly saying about the term Constitution. They need to work through enough different sentences to completely fill the grid. Emphasize to students that they are not to “divide and conquer”. They must all work together to discuss and come to agreement on a word or phrase for each box. (This helps them practice reasoning by justifying why they are selecting a particular word or phrase.) | Students are to determine how the author is defining and developing the concept of “Constitution” by looking one occurrence of the word at a time and determining its usage/meaning in the context of that sentence. |
| 15-20 minutes | Show students the next grid. Point out the top row. Emphasize that each row must have a category at the top. Now they must look at their initial word grid and find commonalities among the words. They must come up with at least three different categories, but cannot use more than six. Under no circumstances may they create a “miscellaneous” category. | Students are working in groups and discussing possible categories for their words. They are reasoning and justifying their choices. They are problem-solving where to place the words that don’t fit their initial categories. They are developing a deeper understanding of the concept “Constitution”. |
| DAY 2 (This is a natural place to break up the exercise if you are unable to complete the activity in one contained class period.) |
| 10 minutes | Once the category grid has been completed – EVERY word from the initial grid has been categorized, direct student groups to use their categories OR what they learned by creating the categories to compose a meaningful, complex definition of the term “Constitution” and write it on the lines provided on the back of the handout. | Students are working in groups to create a complex definition using categories and powerful combinations of distinct words from the initial passage. Once each group has composed their definition, a representative from each group writes out the definition on the board for the entire class to read. |
| 5 minutes | Projects the full dictionary definition of Constitution on the PowerPoint. Reads dictionary definition aloud to the entire class. Provides time for students to compare their definitions to the dictionary definition. Teacher reads each student-generated complex definition on the board to the whole class. | Students look at and hear the dictionary definition being read aloud by the teacher. Students hear their classmates’ definitions being read aloud. Students compare all definitions presented silently on their own. |
| 10 minutes | Direct students to reconsider their original definitions and to add things from all of the different definitions to their own. Students are to work individually to improve their definition. | Students improve upon their definition using all the above mentioned resources. |
| 5 minutes | Teacher serves as scribe. The whole group works together to compose a single, complex definition of Constitution. | Students work together to create one complete complex definition of Constitution. Then they copy the agreed upon definition on their paper. |
| 5-10 minutes | Direct students to do the final two steps of the process. Ask students to reflect upon what they have learned during the process of creating a complex definition about the word Constitution. Then, ask students to reflect upon their learning and compose two questions they have about the Constitution. | Students are writing down three things they have learned about the concept of Constitution.Students compose two questions they still have about the Constitution. |
| \*\*\*\* | Teacher uses the questions to direct future lessons. |  |

**Description of Lesson Assessment:** Use the Complex Definition Assessment Page. Ask students to write a definition of Constitution PRIOR to beginning the lesson. They will need it for comparison in their reflection following the lesson.

Student created final complex definition. Extension activity – students can look for current events that highlight one of the attributes of the Constitution contained within their own definition.

**Developing a Complex, Context Definition for: Constitution**

**Excepted from Michael Kammen’s “A Machine That Would Go of Itself.” Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition**

. . . THE NOTION of a constitution as some sort of machine or engine, had its origins in Newtonian science. Enlightened philosophers, such as David Hume, liked to contemplate the world with all of its components as a great machine. Perhaps it was inevitable, as politics came to be regarded as a science during the 1770s and ‘80s, that leading revolutionaries in the colonies would utilize the metaphor to suit their purposes. In 1774 Jefferson’s Summary View mentioned “the great machine of government.” . . .

. . . After our Constitution got fairly into working order it really seemed as if we had invented a machine that would go of itself, and this begot a faith in our luck which even the civil war but momentarily disturbed.

In the quarter century that followed . . . , a cultural transition took place that leads us to the last of the major constitutional metaphors. We may exemplify it with brief extracts from three prominent justices: Holmes, who wrote in 1914 that “the provisions of the Constitution are not mathematical formulas . . . they are organic living institutions”; Cardozo, who observed in 1925 that “a Constitution has an organic life”; and Frankfurter, who declared in 1951 that “the Constitution is an organism.”

In 1912, when Woodrow Wilson ran for the presidency, a key passage in his campaign statement, The New Freedom, elaborated upon Lowell’s assertion. “The makers of our Federal Constitution,” in Wilson’s words, “constructed a government as they would have constructed an orrery (an apparatus for representing the motions of the planets). Politics in their though was a variety of mechanics. The Constitution was founded on the law of gravitation. The government was to exist and move by virtue of the efficacy of ‘checks and balances.’”

[These politicians] responded to the same current of cultural change; but they were not attempting to be intellectually trendy by explaining government in terms of evolutionary theory. The word-concept they both used in condemning a Newtonian notion of constitutionalism was “static”. Wilson spelled out the implications: “Society is a living organism and must obey the laws of life, not of mechanics; it must develop. All that progressive ask or desire is permission – in an era when ‘development,’ ‘evolution,’ is the scientific word – to interpret the Constitution according to the Darwinian principle; all they ask is recognition of the fact that a nation is a living thing and not a machine.” . . .

I would describe the basic pattern of American constitutionalism as one of conflict within consensus. At first glance, perhaps, we are more likely to notice the consensus . . .

There is . . . a . . . closely linked aspect of American constitutionalism about which there has been no consensus; namely, whether our frame of government was meant fairly unchanging or flexible. Commentators are quick to quote Justice Holmes’s “theory of our Constitution. It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment.” Although much less familiar, and less eloquent, more Americans have probably share this sentiment, written in 1936 by an uncommon common man, the chief clerk in the Vermont Department of Highways: “I regard the Constitution as of too much value to be experimented with.”

The assumption that our Constitution is lapidary has a lineage that runs, among the justices, from Marshall and Taney to David J. Brewer and George Sutherland. It has been the dominant assumption for most of our history. . . to regard the U.S. Constitution as “rigid” by comparison with the British. The idea that adaptability was desirable emerged gradually during the mid-nineteenth century. . . and achieved added respectability in 1906. . . The Constitution, he said, “should be liberally interpreted – interpreted as if it were intended as the foundation of a great nation, and not merely a temporary expedient for the united action of thirteen small States . . . . Like all written Constitutions, there is an underlying danger in its inflexibility.” For about a generation that outlook slowly gained adherents, until the two contradictory views were essentially counterpointed in strength by the 1930s.

Meanwhile, a third position appeared . . . – one that might be considered a compromise because it blended facets of the other two. This moderately conservative, evolutionary position was expressed in 1903 by James Ford Rhodes, a nationalistic businessman-turned-historian. The Constitution, in his mind, “is rigid in those matters which should not be submitted to the decision of a legislature or to a popular vote without checks which secure reflection and a chance for the sober second thought, [yet] it has proved flexible in its adaptation to the growth of the country .” . . .

Admittedly, our strict constructionists have on occasion stretched the Constitution, as Jefferson did in 1803 to acquire the vast Louisiana Territory. Lincoln, Wilson, and FDR each stood accused of ignoring constitutional restraints; yet each one could honestly respond that, within the framework of a Constitution intended to be flexible in an emergency, his goal had been to preserve the Union, to win a war fought for noble goals, or to overcome the worst and most prolonged economic disaster in American history. In each instance their constitutional critics spoke out clearly, a national debate took place, and clarification of our constitutional values occurred. Sometimes that clarification has come from the Supreme Court; sometimes from a presidential election campaign; sometimes from a combination of the two; and sometimes by means of political compromise. Each mode of resolution is a necessary part of our democratic system. I am led to conclude that Americans have been more likely to read and understand their Constitution when it has been controversial, or when some group contended that it had been misused, than in those calmer moments when it has been widely venerated as an instrument for all time . . .

Above all . . . there has been more to the story of constitutionalism in American culture than the history of the Constitution itself. The latter is a cherished charter of institutions and a declaration of protections. The former, constitutionalism, embodies a set of values, a range of options, and a means of resolving conflicts within a framework of consensus. It has supplied stability and continuity to a degree the framers could barely have imagined.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Constitution**

Read the excerpted article “A Machine that Would Go of Itself” silently and independently.

In the space below, work as a team to write down brief bullet point definitions for each usage of the word “constitution”. All team members need to record all information. You must write down fifteen words/phrases or more. When we share with the class, please write down any new words mentioned that you do not already have on your list.

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Now that you have a long list of words and phrases which are associated with the word “constitution”, please work in your small group to categorize all of these words. You must name between four and five categories and then place every word in the appropriate category. No word can go uncategorized. No category can be named “miscellaneous” or something that holds ones that don’t fit. A word from your list may serve as a category name.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category 1 Name | Category 2 Name | Category 3 Name | Category 4 Name | Category 5 Name | Category 6 Name |
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As a group, please consider your categories and then write a definition of the word “Constitution” that reflects the author’s connotation using the words from the text and your categories. (Everyone in your group will write the same thing on their paper):

According to the author, Constitution \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Now write the dictionary definition of the term Constitution – write all possible meanings: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Think: After your classmates share their definitions and the dictionary definition is shared, what is one thing you might consider adding or deleting from your definition?

Now, make improvements on your own to your previous complex definition of Constitution adding key ideas provided by your classmates you might have missed earlier:

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Copy the definition created by the whole class in the space below:

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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Brainstorm a list of three things you have already learned about “Constitution”

1.

2.

3.

What are two questions you have about the concept of “Constitution?”

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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Concept Definition Assessment**

Pre-assessment: Define Constitution in your own words: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Once you have completed the pre-assessment, set this page aside until after the lesson.

Write each definition below:

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| --- | --- |
| Dictionary Definition of Constitution: | Complex Context Definition of Constitution: |
|  |  |

What is the difference between the two definitions? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How does the dictionary definition help you in understanding this concept? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How has the definition derived from the context of the reading helped you in understanding this concept?

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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the disadvantage of only using the dictionary definition? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the disadvantage of only using the context definition? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How does your pre-assessment version of the definition compare to your final definition? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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TEACHER USE ONLY - EXAMPLE

**Constitution**

Read the excerpted article “A Machine that Would Go of Itself” silently and independently.

In the space below, work as a team to write down brief bullet point definitions for each usage of the word “constitution”. All team members need to record all information. You must write down fifteen words/phrases or more. When we share with the class, please write down any new words mentioned that you do not already have on your list.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Machine | institution | rigid | controversial | flexible | dynamic |
| Political | National | Creation | Debatable | Principles | government |
| Order | Law of gravitation | Experiment | Foundation | Organized | Preservation |
| Organic | Conflict | Consensus | Complex | Reflection | Law |
| Commitment | Efficient | Lapidary | Checks and Balances | framework | transition |

Now that you have a long list of words and phrases which are associated with the word “constitution”, please work in your small group to categorize all of these words. You must name between four and five categories and then place every word in the appropriate category. No word can go uncategorized. No category can be named “miscellaneous” or something that holds ones that don’t fit. A word from your list may serve as a category name.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **STRUCTURE** | **PROCESSES** | **FUNCTION** | **INTERPRETATION** | Category 5 Name | Category 6 Name |
| machine | Conflict | transition | lapidary |  |  |
| complex | Consensus | preservation | efficient |  |  |
| framework | Reflection | political | controversial |  |  |
| national | Checks and Balances | transition | commitment |  |  |
| order | debatable | flexible | organic |  |  |
| organized |  | dynamic | Law of gravitation |  |  |
| law |  | foundation |  |  |  |
| institution |  |  |  |  |  |

As a group, please consider your categories and then write a definition of the word “Constitution” that reflects the author’s connotation using the words from the text and your categories. (Everyone in your group will write the same thing on their paper):

STUDENT EXAMPLES: The Constitution is an experimental framework built through the processes of conflict and consensus to serve as the law of the nation as a whole and preserves the nation with its dynamic ability to reflect the wishes of the people.

A Constitution is an idea set as the foundation of laws that guide a country that is both rigid and flexible at the same time and designed to preserve the political ideas of the nation.

Now write the dictionary definition of the term Constitution – write all possible meanings: an established law or custom, physical makeup of an individual, act of organizing and setting up a state or society, basic principles and laws of a nation, written instrument embodying the rules of a political or social organization.

Example of a whole class definition:

The Constitution is an experimental framework of government based upon controversy with a flexible foundation that requires consensus among political, cultural, social, and ideological differences to ensure security and order.

Brainstorm examples from students:

1. The Constitution is designed to allow change.

2. The Constitution is self-sustaining.

3. The Constitution can be interpreted in a variety of ways that change over time.

What are two questions you have about the concept of “Constitution?”

How much sentimental thought and experimentation go into producing such a unique document?

If the Constitution upholds American traditions, yet constantly changes through re-interpretation, what is the happy medium?

Why do we change the laws instead of just following what was made by the original framers?

What about the Constitution of the United States makes it function so much better that other constitutions or forms of government?