



Big Words, Big Ideas

(Catrow, n.p.)

TAH: A More Perfect Union – Final Project

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“Big Words, Big Ideas” (Catrow, n.p.)

We, the people of the United States of America, have the good fortune to live in a democratic society. This did not happen by accident; in fact, a group of brilliant men discussed, compromised, and questioned each other while writing a constitution to create a “more perfect union.” The Constitution of the United States of America is considered the supreme law of the land. It provides the foundation for legal authority, establishes the framework by which our government is organized, and details rights of individual states. Our constitution, the oldest and shortest written constitution, continues to provide our country a solid foundation on which to function. People today continue to discuss, make compromises, and question what we, all the people including kids, need in order to work toward an even “more perfect union.”

It is important to remember that the Constitution was not a perfect document. In fact, the men who wrote it acknowledged this fact. In a letter to Patrick Henry on September 24, 1787, George Washington states, “I wish the Constitution which is offered had been made more perfect, but I sincerely believe it is the best that could be obtained at this time” (Kammen,p56). Washington and the others at the Convention knew that they could not create a document that would address the desires and needs of all who beheld it. Each state and person living in such had views that differed widely from the other; one document could not possibly encompass the breadth of these views and meet all the individual needs.

Children must understand that people and the documents they create are not and cannot always be perfect. They must learn that people need to work together to discuss, question and compromise on things that meet the needs of most, but may not meet all of their individual needs at the time. Our students should have the opportunity to participate in a democratic classroom. I believe this can occur through the process of creating a class constitution. One of the main goals

of my classroom is to create an environment in which every voice is heard and the social and academic curriculums are both priorities when planning. Students should learn that creating rules is a process and living by them is a journey. The process and journey is something we need to partake in in order to meet goals and feel safe. In an effort to teach these values to the students in my class, I use David Catrow's book, *We the Kids*. This book gives a summary of the Preamble portion of the Constitution and explains the words and phrases in child-friendly terms. The students have an opportunity to look at the Constitution and recognize the significance of it at the time it was created and today. Students then use this knowledge to create classroom rules. The study of the Constitution allows students to understand American civic culture and the importance of such.

Lesson Plan

Title: Big Words, Big Ideas

Grade Level: 3 – 5

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks:

History & Social Science: 3.6 Identify the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights as key American documents (c).

English Language Arts: 2.2 Contribute knowledge to class discussion in order to develop ideas for a class project and generate interview questions to be used as part of the project.

Objective: Students will be able to identify the Constitution of the United States and explain, through words and pictures, the meaning of the language in the Preamble.

Materials: *We the Kids*, David Catrow

Vocabulary cards – 12 words/phrases from Preamble and corresponding definitions written in child-friendly language (from *We the Kids*)

12, 9x9 inch squares of white paper

Crayons, colored pencils, pencils

Copy of the Constitution of the United States

Procedures:

1. As a whole class, discuss what rules are and brainstorm list of rules at home and at activities children participate in. Discuss why rules are important. Introduce idea we need to generate rules in the classroom so we can all work safely and are able to achieve our goals we have set forth (done in a previous lesson).

2. Ask students if they think the United States has always been the way it is today, i.e.: 50 states, rules, President, Congress, etc. Lead children through discussion that the United States has changed and that people worked very hard to make our country free and safe for everyone, even kids because kids are people too.
3. Show the students the book, *We the Kids*. Tell the children this book is about the Constitution of the United States. Solicit the children's' previous knowledge of the Constitution. Ask children to ask their families to share information they know about the Constitution with them and bring the information in the following day.
4. Day 2, during Morning Meeting or group time, ask children to share information about the Constitution with the class. Share some of your knowledge with the class as well as needed based on family information, i.e.: date, people, etc. show students the paper copy of the Constitution and hang in classroom.
5. Show children the book again and explain that we will be reading more about the 1st part of the Constitution, the Preamble.
6. Explain to the group that the author wants to share some information with them that he feels is important about how we can take big words that adults use and make them easier to understand by using words we already know.
7. Read the author's ideas and discuss with class.
8. Remind children the Constitution was written a very long time ago (add math component to find difference between current year and year signed) and people used "big words" when writing the document. Tell children the dog in the book

will help us understand these “big words” and we will work on a class project to help us and other kids in the school understand them better too.

9. Read the book. Allow children time to view and comment on the illustrations as the pictures will help students understand the terms more clearly.
10. After reading the book, review the vocabulary.
11. Explain that children will work with a partner to create a quilt square explaining the vocabulary of the Preamble. Tell children their partner will be determined by finding the vocabulary word or phrase and definition that match. Inform children the quilt will hang in the hall to share with their peers.
12. Children select a card from the basket and discuss the card with classmates to find the match. Allow children to use the book as a reference. Assist as needed.
13. Once children are matched, go through the book again and have students line up in order of the words in the Preamble. Have each child read his/her card/definition to reinforce learning.
14. Provide a written example of the completed quilt square with the “big word” written on the top of the square, the child-friendly definition on the bottom of the square, and an illustration to support the meaning in the center. Ask children to share ideas on how to work with a partner, i.e.: discuss the picture, take turns, sharing materials, etc.
15. Provide partners the square and allow children to work where they would like in the classroom.

16. Seek knowledge by discussing squares as children work. Ask: “How did you decide what to draw?” “What does the flag symbolize?” “why do you think the men who wrote the Constitution included this word(s) and/or idea(s)”, etc.
17. When complete, have children put themselves in order again and each partner group read and explain their square.
18. Tape squares together and display in hall with the title “Big Words, Big Ideas.”
19. Generate classroom rules and remind children to discuss, question, and compromise as the list is generated and finalized. Create a class constitution using agreed upon rules and have all children sign it. Hang class constitution in a prominent place and refer to the rules and process of creating them as needed throughout the year. Send a copy of the class constitution home for families to discuss.

Assessment: Creation of square with relevant illustration to match vocabulary.

Discussion in partner groups regarding understanding of their square. Questions and discussions generated by students amongst themselves. Follow up group discussion the following day at Morning Meeting or group time to ensure understanding.

Demonstration of children to tie importance of Constitution with the importance of rules in own classroom and outside of school.

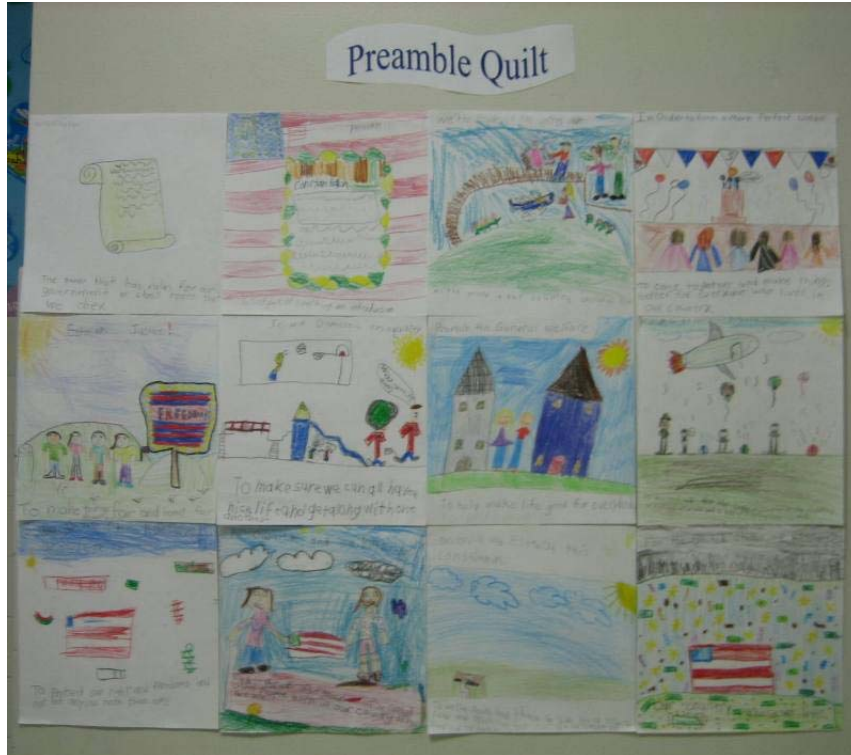
Modifications: Create multi-leveled partner groups rather than random groups. Allow or assign children to look at the Constitution in more detail and create a poster or written report to explain a student selection portion in child-friendly terms. Create a mock Constitution debate and discuss rules for a new classroom/school activity.

Reference Page

Catrow, David (2002). *We the Kids, The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States*. New York, N.Y., Penguin Putnam Inc.

Kammen, A. (1986). *The Origins of the American Constitution A Documentary History*. New York, N.Y., Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

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