Children’s Book about the Constitution

Primary Content Area: American Government

Introduction
The United States Constitution can be a complex and dry topic to many who learn it as well as those who teach it. However, no one can deny the importance of knowing our basic rights, as well as the political process, so that we may become active citizens of our country. This service-learning project will enable students to develop a colorful way of learning about the Constitution through graphic organization and memory games. More specifically, this project will ask students to teach a moral lesson (7th graders from feeder schools) using what they have learned about the Constitution.

Students will engage in activities to learn about the different elements in the Constitution as well as the motives for why it was written. Was the Constitution written fairly? Has the United States always practiced the democracy that it has preached? How did we get to the point where we are today? How is the Constitution more than just a set of laws? How does the Constitution affect all of us? These are some of the key questions that will be explored in this service-learning project.

Project Goals
- Students will learn about the amendments to the Constitution, the three branches or government, qualifications for office, how a bill becomes a law, the federal system and its system of checks and balances.
- Students will learn how the Constitution is applicable in everyday life.
- Students will create books about the Constitution and educate younger students using these books.
- Students will reflect on their service experiences.

Procedures/Project Sequence
1. As a warm up, students will brainstorm and share how they think the Constitution is applicable to them. Why do they need to know about it?
2. Students will read the Preamble aloud. What is the point of the Constitution? Students will write notes as we learn more on the Constitution, reflecting whether the Constitution holds up to the principles of the Preamble. Discuss with your students for whom the Constitution was written. Why was the Constitution written? What inspired the United States to be the first modern democracy?
3. Students will read and discuss The Federalist 10. Have your class debate in two groups using this document. One team should argue for democracy and one argue for a republic. Reflection: How did the “founding fathers” decide on a democratic republic?
4. Students will complete a graphic organizer about the first three articles of the Constitution naming and identifying the qualifications, powers and terms for the three branches.
5. Have your students discuss the first three articles and in groups create character maps of the President, Senator, Representative, and Supreme Court Justice. Students should draw one of them and write characteristics to describe them, such as must be 30 years or older, live in the state representing for 7 years, be a citizen for 9 years. Each group will present theirs to the class.
6. Students will complete a graphic organizer about the Checks and Balances outlined in the Constitution.

7. Review and then stage a quiz game with your students. Students should first review the branches of government and specific powers and then be prepared to participate in the quiz game. For the game, the teacher will describe in first person a power over another branch. Groups will have to identify the correct branch.

8. Students will take notes from their Constitution text paraphrasing each Constitutional Amendment and then create an illustration that goes with the Amendment.

9. For your service project students will create illustrated children’s books about the Constitution. Books with blank pages can be purchased at www.barebooks.com for a $1.50 per book (28 pages). Students must choose one topic related to the Constitution or choose an Amendment. Their book should be fictional, have a main character, and include true facts in the book. The book should teach a lesson about guaranteed constitutional rights and might address the following: “The Constitution is important because...” or, “If Tamara had known the Amendments...”

10. These books will be shared with 7th graders at your local elementary school, who also need to take the Constitution test.

11. Reflection: Lead your students in a classroom discussion about their experiences with the seventh graders. To extend their learning about the Constitution, ask students to identify a contemporary social/political issue that can be connected to a constitutional right (i.e., current debate over gun control). Have your students write a 1-2 page newspaper or magazine story about the issue and its connection to the Constitution.

12. Evaluation: The finished Constitution books and their presentations to the 7th graders will be evaluated and the results from the Constitution test.

Community Partners/Resources
To find schools in your area, go to http://www.greatschools.net/

Website
The Federalist #10
http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm

Suggested Resources
The United States Constitution
The Federalist 10
School House Rock: America Rock
http://www.vrml.k12.la.us/curriculum/schoolhouserock/ss_shr.htm
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzAjlK0ovo8
www.barebooks.com

Addendum
This project addresses the following Common Core Standards and Social Emotional Standards
CC.K-12.R.R.1 Key Ideas and Details: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CC.K-12.SL.1 Comprehension and Collaboration: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.K-12.SL.5 Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

1A.4a: Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behavior.
2A.4a: Analyze how similarities and differences between one’s own and others’ perspectives.
3B.4b: Apply decision-making skills to establish responsible social and work relationships.

Duration
Students should spend 11-16 hours depending upon the amount of time spent on the book project. The suggested length for this project is 6-10 weeks.

Preparation: Classroom learning/Discussion/Research – 4-6 hours
Action: Creation of books/Presentation to 7th graders – 5-7 hours
Reflection: Writing/Discussion – 2-3 hours

Cross Curricular Connections
Connections with English and Art courses could be made during this project.