Teaching the Constitution to English Language Learners
Primary Content Area: American Government

Introduction
Studying the United States Constitution is important for any American who wants to understand the rights endowed to the citizen as well as the responsibilities expected of them. This service-learning project will fulfill two functions: It will enable students of the Constitution to see its guiding principles and their relevancy. As a service project, students will teach these guiding principles to others, and it will enable English Language Learners who often have limited educational opportunities to be empowered through an understanding of the American legal system. Along the way, the project will ask probing questions: Who exactly is endowed with the rights of the Constitution? Those who are citizens? Those who have permanent legal status? Is it only those born in the United States? Only those who know enough English to have the law on their side?

Students will participate in activities to learn about the elements of the Constitution as well as the motives behind its development. How is the Constitution more than just a set of guiding principles? How does the Constitution affect all of us? Was the Constitution written fairly? Has the United States always practiced the democracy that it has preached? Does the Constitution apply to everyone living in the United States?

Project Goals
- Students will learn about the amendments to the Constitution, the three branches of 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 lessons to teach aspects of the Constitution to adult English Language Learners from the community.
- Students will reflect on their service experiences.

Procedures/Project Sequence
1. Students will read Leviathan. In this reading, Thomas Hobbs discusses the nature of man. According to article, man is evil and needs to be harnessed by strong leadership.
2. Students will discuss whether they agree or disagree with the ideas presented in Leviathan. Students can debate both sides of the argument. Students will also discuss the purpose of government? Is it to give the people what they need? To protect the people from each other? To protect the people from invaders? To distribute resources equitably throughout society?
3. In groups of 3-4, students will create their own purpose for government and an initial set of laws to govern society. Students will draft on butcher paper the purpose of government. Students will now develop 10 laws they feel are necessary to maintain order in a society. (Students will experience the process of creating a legal system and compare this with the ideas found in the US Constitution.)
4. Students will read the Preamble to the Constitution aloud. What does the preamble say about the purpose of government? Students will write notes as they learn more about 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?

5. 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?

6. Students will complete a graphic organizer about the first three articles of the Constitution naming and identifying the powers reserved for the three branches. Have your students discuss the first three articles after completing their graphic organizers.

7. In groups students will 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 its character map to the class.

8. Students will complete a graphic organizer about the Checks and Balances outlined in the Constitution.

9. 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.

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

11. For your service project students will create their own lessons on the Constitution. They may range from Leviathan and the need for government, The Preamble, the three branches of government and their roles, qualifications and numbers, the Checks and Balances system, the Federal System, and the Amendments. Students will find creative ways to teach what they have learned.

12. Students will be responsible for creating 2-3 lessons, complete with topic, activities, length of activities and assessment (formal or informal). Students are encouraged to create lessons that will be easy to understand for someone whose first language is not English. For example, students might create lessons that might be easily understood by someone in 5th grade. Students are also encouraged to use visuals and translations when possible.

13. Students and teachers will seek permission to host parents or community members who are English Language Learners or other parents interested in learning about the U.S. Constitution in the school or local library. *Students and teachers will determine how many community members they want to teach to, and how often they would like to meet with them. Once a week for 5 sessions? How long? How many students will teach at any given time?

14. Once logistics have been determined, students will host their lessons. Students are encouraged to give a pre and post Constitution test to the adult learners, to see what they have learned.

15. Reflection: Lead your students in a classroom discussion about their experiences with the English Language Learners. 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.

16. Evaluation: What kind of feedback did students receive about their lessons?

Resources
Leviathan: http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phi302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-c.html#CHAPTERXIII
The Federalist #10: http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm
The United States Constitution
School House Rock: America Rock
Constitutional Rights Foundation: www.crfc.org

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.

1A.4a: Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behavior.
2A.4a: Analyze 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 15-20 hours on this project depending upon the amount of time spent on their
education project. The suggested length for this project is 6-10 weeks. Hours can be broken down
into the following categories:

Preparation: Classroom learning/Discussion/Research/Creation of Lessons – 6-8 hours
Action: Presentation to adult learners – 6-10 hours
Reflection: Writing/Discussion – 2-4 hours

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